

The background of the cover is a painting. It depicts a person sitting on a stone ledge inside a ruined Gothic building, looking out through a large, arched window. The view outside shows a dense forest of evergreen trees under a warm, orange and yellow sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The architecture is dark and textured, with visible stone and wood.

# Rethinking German Idealism

S. J. McGrath & Joseph Carew



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S.J. McGrath • Joseph Carew  
Editors

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## Introduction: What Remains of German Idealism?

Joseph Carew and S.J. McGrath

The ‘death’ of German Idealism has been decried innumerable times since its revolutionary inception, whether by the nineteenth-century critique of Western metaphysics, phenomenology, the various strands of contemporary French philosophy, or the founding figures of analytic philosophy. Even more recently, some strands of speculative realism and new materialism have sought to leave its so-called ‘excesses’ behind. The figures that here strike an accord are as diverse as the movements themselves: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Russell, Heidegger, Deleuze, Derrida, Maldiney, Harman, and Meillassoux, to name just a few.

Yet in the face of 200 years of sustained, extremely rigorous attempts to leave behind its legacy, German Idealism has resisted its philosophical death sentence: no attempt to situate it in the abyssal forgetfulness of a forever lost past, to render it into a mere artifact for the historically

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curious, has been able to succeed. The very fact that it continues to be an inescapable point of reference—a *negative* point of reference is, after all, a point of reference all the same—suggests, to put the matter provocatively by risking a bold claim, that the specter haunting the Western philosophical scene is not capitalism,<sup>1</sup> nor that of the Cartesian subject,<sup>2</sup> as has been claimed, but that of German Idealism. It persists in our thinking like a symptom we cannot get rid of, since every time we distance ourselves from it, it comes back with force—or we are forced to go back to it. For this exact reason it is timely to ask in a reflective tone: ‘What remains of German Idealism?’ In what ways do its fundamental concepts and texts still speak to us in a philosophically relevant sense such that this perpetual resurgence of, or return to, its major representatives could be judged as something positive rather than a mere setback in the advance of philosophical knowledge? Are there as yet unexcavated resources present in this tradition that could be used, resources that we may have previously overlooked when its death bell was so prematurely tolled? It is precisely this set of questions that this volume seeks to explore by presenting new, challenging rethinkings of its now canonical thinkers, rethinkings that have been, in many ways, only made possible by the myriad of recently developed conceptual tools now at our disposal.

For despite the fact that the tradition of German Idealism is undoubtedly a historical event whose heyday is a thing of the irretrievable past—a heyday that could never reoccur with the might it once had (if it ever will at all)—there has been an extraordinary, unpredictable increase in groundbreaking secondary literature over the course of the past decades that, criticizing and in some cases building upon the literature of the earlier twentieth and nineteenth century, radically puts into question our established notions of Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling. Thanks to this ever-growing body of work, it no longer goes without saying, for instance, that transcendental idealism inconsistently presupposes, and hence founders because of, a ‘Platonic’ two-world hypothesis. Nor can we outright assume that the Fichtean subject falls succumb to a rampant

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ‘Communist Manifesto,’ in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970), 473.

<sup>2</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 2000), 1.

subjectivism in which all reality is a mere posit of an absolutely free ego. In terms of absolute idealism, the idea that Hegel conceives of all features of reality as manifestations of a completely and utterly self-mediating Notion—that logic and its universal and necessary dialectical moves are responsible for even the most minute details of everything that did, does, or will exist—has been contested. As for Schelling, scholars have accumulated enough textual evidence to make highly implausible the claim that he is a Protean thinker who simply changed his mind each time he put himself to the task of transposing his thoughts to paper (a trait that, supposedly, made him a bad philosopher who never had the patience to develop a philosophy really worthy of our admiration insofar as philosophy ought to strive after *a* system, *the* system). Even the picture of Hegel in which he created a strictly *a priori* system in his maturity post-Jena and then just worked out its various parts based on this initial deduced plan can no longer be defended. We have now taken full cognizance, among other things, of the various shifts in conceptual emphases and the reworking of material in light of new scientific findings throughout the three versions of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, which prove that his system was, up until his death, in a state a dynamic becoming with respect to both exposition and our knowledge of the real. All of this to just highlight how there is now *more and more* need to rethink German Idealism outside of inherited wisdom, as this new body of secondary literature has shown us and passionately has done in its own way. In many cases, this wisdom just can no longer to be trusted.

Consequently, this not only opens up, but also requires us to cultivate a space for creativity in interpretation in order to do justice to these philosophers. And such creativity has found an outlet not just in academic experts. It has also found it in living philosophers. Indeed, an ever-increasing number of contemporary philosophers from both the continental and analytic traditions—ranging in diversity from Brandom and McDowell to Butler and Malabou, but also including individuals such as Habermas, Priest and Gabriel—have published on it and have explicitly, in some instances, returned to its milieu in order to find inspiration or analogues for their own thought. This is to say nothing of even older philosophers who evidently learned much from what it had to offer, such as Heidegger and Tillich. If the tradition still speaks to us, the sheer

multitude of these philosophers with such diverging interests attests to the fact it doesn't do so in a one-sided manner, that is, from the formal standpoint of a certain, limited domain of enquiry. From philosophy of language to theories of recognition, politics to metaphysics and religion, its concepts have much to offer us—and in each case we encounter a new rethinking of German Idealism, a rethinking that cashes it out in terms that make it resonate with us in a profound fashion.

And last but certainly not least, these two efforts have also been immensely aided by the ongoing work of the new historical-critical German editions of the oeuvre of these philosophers. These have not only helped us gain invaluable precision concerning the internal genesis of individual philosophers' positions,<sup>3</sup> but have also made publicly available texts that were, in many cases, previously unpublished,<sup>4</sup> lost,<sup>5</sup> and even

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, we once relied on Karl Rosenkranz' dating of Hegel's Jena writings. Although the first person with access to Hegel's literary estate, he grossly misdated them. It was not until the work of the *Gesammelte Werke* that Hegel's handwriting, alongside its changes over the years, was put to intense statistical analysis, thereby allowing these texts—so important to the development of the mature system—to be finally properly dated. For a summary of this situation, see George di Giovanni, introduction to *Science of Logic*, by G.W.F. Hegel, ed. and trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), xiv–xv.

<sup>4</sup> The editors of Fichte's *Gesamtausgabe* have made publicly available multiple versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and various other post-Jena lecture series that were not only never published in Fichte's lifetime, but also never appeared in his posthumously edited works: *Johann Gottlieb Fichte's sämtliche Werke*, 11 vols, ed. I.H. Fichte (Berlin: Veit, 1845–1846). The fact that the former contains 49 volumes is ample evidence of the sheer amount of Fichte now available compared to in the past.

<sup>5</sup> After Hegel's death, his former students came together with the rather noble thought of assembling various transcripts of the lecture series he gave and to which they had access, hoping to bring to the light of a general public the 'system' that were convinced was completed for years and presented orally in the lecture hall. However, the methodologies through which they assembled these transcripts into standalone monographs, with the aid of Hegel's own manuscripts for his lectures, is dubious at best. They paid little to no attention to changes between different lecture courses, combining them as they saw fit to guarantee the logical progression of the dialectical movement as they interpreted it. But without the original source material, it was impossible to test the suspicion that they may have falsified Hegel's own views. Indeed, it was all we had to go on to have any understanding of his views. Now, however, many manuscripts and transcripts—even ones not available to his students—have been found. When one compares these manuscripts and transcripts with the lectures published by his students, the differences between them are in no case simply philosophical niceties. For instance, for a succinct account of how this information may drastically challenge our historical picture of Hegel in the case of aesthetics, see Annemarie Gethmann-Siebert, 'Introduction: The Shape and Influence of Hegel's Aesthetics,' in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art: The Hotho Transcript of the 1823 Berlin Lectures*, by G.W.F. Hegel, trans. Robert Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).



unknown.<sup>6</sup> In light of this new evidence and texts, we have no option but to rethink German Idealism.

Given these three above-mentioned conceptual tools, we can say without doubt that we are still discovering, *in both a hermeneutical and literal sense*, new aspects of the tradition, new resources to make use of. The tradition itself is, as it were, still in a state of development, constantly requiring to be rethought as a variety of recently uncovered texts, innovative interpretative camps, and contemporary philosophical commitments and methodologies force us to approach the German Idealist heritage in a different light than we once did. In short, it is an exciting time to be a German Idealist scholar or student. But what does this volume hope to add to this ever-growing body of secondary literature, philosophical re-appropriation, and historical-critical editions? Both the secondary literature of recent decades on German Idealism and the philosophical re-appropriations of this tradition raise, in their own manner, the question of what remains of German Idealism. They demand of us that we rethink, often radically, its fundamental concepts and texts. This is something we wish to underline. The former powerfully shows that we have not yet fully understood its major representatives such that, if we want to better understand our own philosophical history, even our own historical origins (for philosophy and history are indubitably woven from one and the same fabric), much interpretative work remains to be done. The latter demonstrates that there are many ways in which we can use current theoretical frameworks to breathe new life into certain fundamental concepts and texts, thereby allowing them to enter into our own debates in an often-unexpected way. The German Idealists remain our contemporaries, as if they were never our ancestors, as if they were never a thing of the past. In another vein, the historical-critical editions are, quite literally, excavating the previously unknown remains of the tradition. From all corners, German Idealism is therefore being rethought.

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<sup>6</sup> Schelling's *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung* was first found 160 years after being transcribed in 1831/1832 and only published in 2004 by Felix Meiner, edited by Walter E. Ehrhardt. Similar stories can be told with other transcripts from lecture series, such as the *Grundlegung der positiven Philosophie. Münchner Vorlesung WS 1832/33 und SS 1833*, edited by H. Fuhrmans (Torino: Bortega d'Erasmus, 1972). These give us new insight into the development of Schelling's thinking and even previously unknown concepts.

While these are all irreducibly important senses of the word ‘remain’ (taken in both its verbal and substantive form), each of which entails their own unique form of ‘rethinking’, this volume attempts to take a different approach.<sup>7</sup> It gives ‘rethinking’ a technical meaning of its own in the context it creates. It does not limit itself to presenting new interpretations of iconic figures in order to challenge our established notions of them, although this is indeed one of its primary goals. Nor does it treat the tradition like a dead object of a past now alien to us, the subject matter of a historiography in which we coldly and with disinterest investigate what was, a tendency that some of the otherwise exciting secondary literature sometimes exhibits. Although it does look back to offer a picture of the historical ‘facts’ that is as objectively sound as possible, it does so with an eye toward the ways in which these ‘facts’, once accurately reconstructed with the conceptual tools now at our disposal, may still have potential to offer us something of profound relevance to our contemporary philosophical needs. Consequently, one may say that its approach sketches a history serviceable to life that is an alternative to the ‘monumental history’ that the young Nietzsche espouses in opposition to ‘antiquarian history’.<sup>8</sup> In practicing history, even history for its own sake, this volume looks for great lessons we can still learn from the fundamental concepts and texts of German Idealism, looks for what ‘remains’ alive for us in the past in order to open up new, game-changing theoretical possibilities, and thereby endeavors to rethink the tradition by opening up a space of dialogue with the aid of the ever-increasing resources on hand that force us to drastically reconsider what German Idealism is on its own self-understanding.

But in so doing, it also tries to avoid the problem faced by monumental history. For while the latter similarly looks in the past for ‘great *stimuli*’ for the present, ‘it of course incurs the danger of becoming somewhat

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<sup>7</sup> There are other volumes that do something very similar and deserve mention. For a non-exhaustive list: see Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore, eds, *Fichte: Historical Contexts, Contemporary Controversies* (New Jersey: Humanity Books, 1994); Henri Maler, ed., *Hegel passé, Hegel à venir* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995); Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman, eds, *The New Schelling* (New York: Continuum, 2004); Jason M. Wirth, *Schelling Now: Contemporary Readings of Schelling* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); and Paul Ashton, Toulia Nicolacopoulos, and George Vassilacopoulos, eds, *The Spirit of the Age: Hegel and the Fate of Thinking* (Melbourne: re.press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,’ in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 67ff.

distorted, beautified and coming close to free poetic invention [... T]he past itself suffers harm: whole segments of it are forgotten, despised, and flow away in an uninterrupted colourless flood, and only individual embellished facts rise out of it like islands'.<sup>9</sup> In this way, the volume also distinguishes itself from the above-mentioned contemporary 'retrospections' upon German Idealism because it does not, strictly speaking, try to 'reactualize'<sup>10</sup> or 'translate'<sup>11</sup> Kant, Fichte, Hegel or Schelling. While many of these now popular re-appropriations of German Idealism have a propensity to use the present as the criteria through which we can pick out what in the past is to be saved, or at least interesting enough to deserve conceptual re-rendering, which makes them very close to the 'monumental history' described by Nietzsche, this volume prefers to let our philosophers speak directly to us and then decide, on the basis of the historical reconstruction of their discourse—a historical reconstruction that is indeed inflected by problems that are our own because it is with passion and interest that our gaze is directed at them—in what ways their philosophies remain contemporary to our own in an untimely manner, in face of the passage of time. The emphasis is decisively different: its method is one of an interpretation informed by a general knowledge of the philosophers analyzed that, looking toward the past from the vantage point of the present, tries to discern certain truly immanent possibilities they may contain, waiting to be discovered thanks to the conceptual tools now at our disposal, for our present.

Assembling preeminent scholars and exciting, emerging voices in Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel studies from both sides of the world whose work is innovative, bold and at times daring, this volume therefore seeks to raise the question of 'What remains of German Idealism?', to rethink

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<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, 'The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,' 70–71.

<sup>10</sup> This is a favorite term of Slavoj Žižek, who explicitly states that, for him, 'psychoanalysis is ultimately a tool to reactualize, to render actual for today's time, the legacy of German Idealism.' ('Liberation Hurts: An Interview with Slavoj Žižek (with Eric Dean Rasmussen),' <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/endconstruction/desublimation>).

<sup>11</sup> Markus Gabriel, for instance, speaks of offering 'translations' of the conceptual language of German Idealism 'into our time'. See *Transcendental Ontology: Essays in German Idealism* (New York: Continuum, 2011), x, 37, 132. While speaking of philosophers in a language other than their own is a necessary component of good, accessible interpretation, how exactly such translation is done effects the end product drastically.

its tradition, heritage, and legacy, in a very specific manner. It intends to offer readers a fresh look on this time-honored tradition that draws upon the groundbreaking findings of recent scholarship, newly developed methodologies and historical-critical editions—and in some cases career-long engagements with its thinkers at the philological level required by translation—with the purpose of both giving German Idealism new life and highlighting some of the many possible ways in which it still can be useful for our contemporary philosophical needs. Because these needs and the ways to address them are many, the contributors that have been selected embody a large variety of philosophical interests (transcendental philosophy, philosophy of nature, social theory, philosophy of religion), make use of quite different methodologies (phenomenology, metaphysics, aesthetics, semantics), and often have concerns that are definitively ‘off the beaten’ tracks of German Idealist scholarship convention (the mechanisms of psychological projection, anthropocentrism, globalization and technology, decolonialism). Many of the positions advocated risk being atypical, going against the grain of hermeneutical wisdom and recent proposals for new interpretations, in order to do justice to the thinkers that they discuss. Others have the courage to risk theses that many would never dare. In each case, however, there is provocation. Yet it is this kind of audacity that the body of secondary literature, the philosophical re-appropriations, and the historical-critical editions have made possible, if not demand. We hope that by bringing together such a multitude of different rethinkings we will add something stimulating to German Idealism studies that will inspire a series of further enquiries concerning how German Idealism is still alive, how it offers as yet unrealized potentials for thinking, or ways in which it fails to do so, by using the conceptual tools we now have at our disposal. The inclusion of both established and upcoming scholars from different areas of the globe, who come from different linguistic and academic backgrounds, plays a crucial role in this. It is meant as much as possible: one, to give room to those who normally—largely because untranslated into English—often fall out of the purview of typical ‘Anglo-Saxon’ scholarship and to a new generation that all too often risks being forgotten because of the ‘big names’ whose work, albeit important and praiseworthy, can be found everywhere; and, two, to help make more vivid the various ways in which we can rethink

German Idealism by drawing attention, as much as we were able to, to the great plurality of different scholars that find something important in it.<sup>12</sup>

So far we have only spoken in abstract terms of rethinking German Idealism in the context of the aims of this volume. In what ways, then, do we intend to do so concretely? Let's speak first in broad strokes of the organizational principle behind the ordering of the individual essays before looking at them one by one to help orient the reading to the innovative, bold and at times daring philosophical terrain it opens up.

The series of rethinkings that follow are arranged in a loose historical trajectory that covers many, though obviously by no means all, of the major developments in German Idealism. Starting with Kant, next passing over into Schelling's early philosophy, it then covers Fichte's late *Wissenschaftslehre* or Science of Knowledge before discussing the three components of Hegel's mature system (logic, nature, spirit) and moving unto Schelling's late philosophy of mythology and revelation. A final piece reflects on German Idealism as a whole, thus serving as a conclusion. While these pieces make no claim to chart the complex causes that incite the historical development from thinker to thinker—a task that surely could not be done in a single book, or even multiple volumes—our wager is that placing these thinkers side by side in accordance with the chronological dates of the main texts that are therein discussed has direct consequences for any understanding of that historical development. Few among us today may believe that German Idealism 'begins' with Kant's transcendental philosophy, only to be 'further developed' by Fichte into a subjective idealism, which is then, at its turn, 'corrected' by the objective idealism of Schelling, after which the only theoretically consistent option left is that of Hegel's absolute idealism in light of which Schelling's late philosophy of mythology and revelation must be

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<sup>12</sup>We are, however, aware of the fact a volume 'rethinking' a philosophical tradition could have more diversity than there is here. In particular, there is an obvious lack of women among the contributors. Due to extenuating circumstances, some who were involved or interested could not in the end contribute and given the deadlines associated with publication it proved difficult to find others on short notice. While this is absolutely no justification for the omission of women from the volume, we hope that by drawing attention to our own failure and underlining the ongoing problem of representation of women in philosophy and in German Idealism studies in particular we can, at least, help raise awareness of the problem.

seen regression into the worst kind of pre-critical dogmatic philosophizing, namely Christian apologetics. This ‘history’—developed by Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, with the last step being added by the reception the old Schelling met at Berlin when he came to take over Hegel’s former Chair—is too simple. Nonetheless, even if such a traditional narrative has been largely debunked thanks to recent scholarship, old prejudices die hard. For instance, while the early and middle Schelling have since come into prominence in English literature as decisive alternatives to Hegel’s project and as having a noteworthy philosophy of nature, the late *Philosophy of Revelation* is, in many ways, still underappreciated as a philosophical text. So important in its own time, it has yet to even be translated.<sup>13</sup> And if it is spoken of at all, its fundamental thematic—the historical consciousness of God in mythology and revelation—is usually downplayed or outright ignored. Similarly Fichte, particularly the post-Jena Fichte, is taken little notice of, although that is beginning to change. Here too we still lack important translations. It is difficult to not see in this textual state of affairs vestiges of the traditional, Hegelian narrative that declares these philosophers as less worthy of our attention. But as the pieces here assembled show, once we let these philosophers speak for themselves, and then set them side by side in accordance with their chronological order, we can demonstrate, once and for all, not only that we must decisively leave behind such narratives in which the tribunal of history has wrongly decided on the superiority of a given thinker or thinkers over others and opt instead for a history of philosophy more in tune to the positions of each. Just as importantly, the reconstructions supplied by the pieces that follow point to the ways in which the texts that they discuss may unexpectedly prove to be of much relevance today, rather than merely exhibiting the internal consistency that one admires in a production of reason. In this way, we hope that the series of rethinkings we have collected together will motivate new studies of these thinkers and their writings, which one may have, without knowing, dismissed thanks to inherited prejudices, by showing the power of each.

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<sup>13</sup> A translation of the Paulus transcript of the inaugural lectures is, however, in preparation by Michael Vater and Joseph Carew.

In ‘Kant’s Philosophy of Projection: The Camera Obscura of the *Inaugural Dissertation*’, Constantin Rauer seeks to answer the question of what remains of Kant. While many have approached this problem in terms of Kant’s mature critical philosophy, Rauer instead draws upon an overlooked parallel that exists between the three kinds of possible errors in logical judgment outlined in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the three kinds of projection outlined in the *Inaugural Dissertation*. In this way, he shows how the critical philosophy itself is a continuation of an earlier confrontation with a certain kind of irrational psychological mechanism involved in speculation, which he describes in great detail. Rauer then demonstrates that this not only forces us to radically rethink the critical philosophy and in particular its critique of metaphysics, but also that it could give us a large amount of resources for making this critique even more powerful and relevant for us today. While post-Kantian idealism tried to develop new, sophisticated methods that would make speculation once again possible by showing how thought can go beyond the critical limits of knowledge without going blind, insofar as they could not have been familiar with Kant’s philosophy of projection it could be the case that they cannot respond to its theoretical worries concerning the irrationality of speculation. And since the contemporary resurgences of metaphysics in continental and analytic philosophy would likewise have to show how they do not fall succumb to projection in their own work, Rauer argues that Kant proves just as much alive as ever in his critique of pure reason.

Alexander Schnell’s essay ‘The Meaning of Transcendental Idealism in the Work of F.W.J. Schelling’ strikes a similar theme. First meditating on the contemporary revival of metaphysics in speculative realism, anthropology, and neuroscience, Schnell then suggests that, for us, all so-called ‘philosophies of the subject’ appear to lack any pertinence. We are no longer satisfied reducing things to human language, experience, or production of sense. If this is the case, can Schelling’s transcendental period even have any purchase for us today? Schnell’s perhaps initially counterintuitive thesis is that it indeed does. But how? To the extent that Schelling’s *System of Transcendental Idealism*, battling against the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* in which in which all reality is a product of the ego, attempts to sketch the transcendental genesis of

*genuine transcendence*—of something that is, in fact, irreducibly other to the ego and its constituting powers—from within the presuppositions of transcendental philosophy itself. This is a highly innovative move within the history of the latter, which Schnell reconstructs with finesse. The idea motivating Schnell's return to the history of transcendental philosophy from within a contemporary context that disdains all 'philosophies of the subject' is that for any philosopher who desires both to be a realist in a strong sense and remain committed to a critical, non-dogmatic thinking, Schelling's success or failure at the task of explaining transcendence transcendently will help pave the way for a new philosophy that might be able to do so more persuasively.

In "Animals, Those Incessant Somnambulists": A Critique of Schelling's Anthropocentrism', Devin Zane Shaw takes up Schelling's philosophy of nature as developed in his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* and the *Treatise On Human Freedom*. In this sense, he continues the theme broached by Schnell's paper concerning the contemporary disdain for 'philosophies of the subject', but now from the opposite angle. As Shaw notes, these two Schellingian texts, which attempt to sketch a new alternative for philosophy beyond the subjectivism of Kant and Fichte, and thus anticipate current metaphysical concerns, have been rediscovered and revitalized by contemporary scholars for the precise reason that they prioritize being over thinking, the world over humanity, in a way that is seen as a necessary corrective for our own anthropocentric cultural worldview. These scholars therefore claim that Schelling has much to offer any philosophy that wishes to think the intrinsic value of nature and the ways in which we depend on it. Shaw argues that while there may indeed a sense in which Schelling upsets this worldview in these texts by powerfully reviving the question of nature, he ultimately privileges humanity thanks to the latter's capacity for reason. Consequently, a careful reconstruction of Schelling's texts points to ways in which he is, in fact, problematic for any attempt to rethink nature. If Schelling's career is marked by an avid anthropocentrism, however, Shaw concludes by showing how his identity-philosophy, a still under-researched period of his huge corpus, might have already sketched a way out of anthropocentrism and therefore supply us with the resources that we require.



In his piece ‘The Non-Existence of the Absolute: Schelling’s *Treatise On Human Freedom*’, Cem Kömürcü shows how Schelling’s late metaphysics gives new life to the arts and in particular poetry. Famously, Schelling here offers a radically new interpretation of the classical distinction between existence and the ground of existence by shifting the emphasis from the ‘reason’ for why something is to the question of how something arises from its dark ‘origin’. In a move that anticipates Derrida and Heidegger, Schelling thereby demonstrates that rationality cannot ultimately explain why something is because the very structure of explanation presupposes that the distinction between existence and the ground of existence has already arisen, but there is nothing in the ground taken as ground that necessitates that existence arise from it. Kömürcü argues that this forces us to conclude that the Absolute is a paradoxical ‘non-ground’ that diverges into these two terms so that the ordered structure of the world becomes possible and in so diverging always serves as its implicit background, a background that is strictly speaking non-existent because it logically subsists ‘beyond’ the ordered structure of the world. As such, it can never be rationally recovered. Since the most important things in life therefore cannot be *known*, they can at best be *shown*—which is why, for Kömürcü, the *Treatise On Human Freedom* itself is largely a work of mytho-poetics and can help us to explain why poets are often so great philosophers.

The next piece by F. Scott Scribner, entitled ‘Disorientation and Inferred Autonomy: Kant and Schelling on Torture, Global Contest and Practical Messianism’, shifts from more generally speaking metaphysical concerns to political ones (although they are interrelated). Taking as its starting point two central techniques of modern scientific torture—extreme sensory deprivation and stress-positions—it seeks to show how these not only derive from globalization, but also from the conflict between faith and reason inherited by German Idealism. Kant’s account of orientation as a mediator in this conflict plays a crucial role in his discussion. While Kant uses it as a groundwork for a particular kind of rational faith within the Enlightenment framework, the Enlightenment has since been criticized both for robbing us of our orientation in the world and making modern scientific torture possible. This challenges the widespread view concerning Kant’s ongoing relevance for contemporary

political discourse in an important way. It is in this context of Kant's inability to think the potentially negative implications of his own position, however, that Scribner argues that Schelling's second draft of the *Ages of the World* takes on new meaning. Here developing a new 'system of times', Schelling tries to combat such a loss of orientation in the world by outlining a practical messianism in which we can, retrospectively, give new meaning to globalization as the technological matter from which spirit can arise. It is crucial to here note that Scribner evidently rethinks readings of Schelling as an avowedly apolitical thinker.

The political theme is then continued by Jean-Christophe Goddard, who offers an extremely innovative, anthropological interpretation of Fichte in 'The Beech and the Palm Tree: Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* as a Project of Decolonization'. This interpretation, though highly idiosyncratic, is the result of a whole career dedicated to Fichte studies, including commentaries and translations. Concentrating on the *Addresses to the German Nation*, typically seen as laying the conceptual foundations for German nationalism, Goddard argues that it in fact holds the key for comprehending the *Wissenschaftslehre* as a whole. By developing a complex model of decolonization, it allows us to understand various versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* as unified. Interpreted thusly, the *Wissenschaftslehre*, rather than being a species of Kantian transcendentalism or German mysticism, reveals itself as an ethnopsychiatric practice (a *medicinam mentis*) that aims at the liberation of a people (the German people) from their colonizers (the French under Napoleon, who are the emblem of the inner logic of the Western reason that has already captivated the German mind). If Fichte appears to talk about epistemology or metaphysics, it is merely because the *Wissenschaftslehre* must first make use of the foreign language of the West—the language of the subjugators whose values have been internalized—to then overcome it, which demands inventing a new language outside of its fundamental dichotomies (for example, being/appearance). This is how we ought to understand Fichte's insistence on the necessarily *oral* nature of his work, its *performativity*: it is as an attempt at collective emancipation. According to Goddard, what makes Fichte so relevant for us today is thus that he shows us how we, as Westerners, could also participate in a project of decolonialization. For if Western reason has led to colonialism, then it is

only through a *Wissenschaftslehre* as an ethnopsychiatric practice that any Western peoples could effectively step outside of it.

The subsequent three articles provide rethinkings of the three major divisions of Hegel's mature system (although each text refers to the other parts). Although other German Idealists have come into their own as independent thinkers to be taken seriously, Hegel still stands strong. In 'Hegel on the Universe of Meaning: Logic, Language, and Spirit's Break from Nature', Joseph Carew, drawing on and correcting many recent 'deflationary' readings of Hegel, argues that Hegel's *Science of Logic* is a highly original theory of semantics. It describes how logic, as the pure structure of thinking, the medium of which is conceptualization, must display a deep bond with the natural languages in which concepts come to be born as ways of comprehending the world. Otherwise, language could not be capable of comprehension at all. This entails that logic, rather than being simply concerned with the principles of proof, must also explain the conditions of the possibility of the universe of meaning that we, as linguistic beings, create in order to give meaning to the world. There is no question of it being a straightforward metaphysics. But Carew then goes on to show that Hegel's *Logic* is not only of ongoing interest because it develops an highly original theory of semantics that could be put in dialogue with contemporary philosophies of language. Given that the categories of logic constitute a self-contained, self-justifying system, the very fact that we are linguistic beings means, as Carew argues, that we are driven to break from nature to bring forth a world of spirit that obeys its own norms. In this way, Hegel gives a logical account of how language metaphysically creates the very *hiatus* separating first and second nature. Yet Hegel does so in such a way that the latter is not only irreducible to the former, but that there is no longer and obscurity or mystery about this irreducibility. As such, Carew not only sketches a new option for understanding Hegelian metaphysics from within a deflationary reading of the *Logic*, but also shows how this understanding advances a fruitful defence of the humanities.

In 'Towards a New Reading of Hegelian Nature: Lack and the Problem of the Spurious Infinite', Wes Furlotte rethinks Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* and its contemporary purchase. Going against its widespread, almost universal dismal due to its so-called speculative excesses, even

among Hegel scholars, Furlotte demonstrates that these traditional, highly critical readings are misleading. Focusing on Hegel's description of nature as overridden by rational self-externality and contingency, he argues that nature must *lack* the interiority and necessity that Hegel ascribes to thinking and the products of spirit. Through a detailed analysis of Hegel's theory of the animal organism, which Hegel himself describes as the pinnacle of nature, Furlotte shows how Hegelian nature could never be an organic, metaphysically harmonious whole in light of the plurality of ways in which the animal is thrown into its environment, caught up in the spurious infinite of sexual reproduction, and the never-ending cycle of violence and death. As a result, it resists full conceptual determination at every step, just like the rest of nature must by implication. In an age like ours where there is a resurgence of interest in nature as having a life other than us, Hegelian nature therefore presents contemporary metaphysics with a wealth of material to draw upon.

Next, Adrian Johnston in 'Absolutely Contingent: Slavoj Žižek and the Hegelian Contingency of Necessity' uses Žižek's rethinking of Hegel's metaphysics as a foil to broach the question of whether Hegel himself has something to offer contemporary Marxism. *Pace* traditional readings of Hegel as a philosopher of absolute necessity, Žižek adamantly stresses that any necessity that we might speak of in Hegel's system is a only retroactive rewriting of an otherwise absolutely contingent becoming. Johnston argues that although much of recent leading Hegel scholarship agrees with Žižek concerning the insurmountable role of contingency in his system, Žižek risks pushing the point too far. He risks making Hegel into a philosopher of the unpredictable event. In this regard, Hegel would be critical of Žižek. If we look at the modal categories developed in the *Science of Logic*, we see that he articulates the logico-metaphysical conditions of a contingent becoming that is always guaranteed to be minimally intelligible in advance. While this entails, just as in Žižek's rethinking of Hegel, that there is no 'end of history' because history is necessarily open, it does allow us to give 'weak predictions' of what *might* happen, which Žižek prohibits. For Johnston, it is precisely in supplying such a framework for limited prediction in which we could meaningfully look for the 'germs of communism' in the world around us that Hegel shows himself as truly relevant. This framework supplies the hope, however tenuous, required for political action.

Very fittingly, the next two pieces focus on the late Schelling and his response to Hegel's system. Although it is uncertain whether Schelling's own reading of Hegel is indeed the correct one, the force of his response to the dangers he perceives in it, and by consequence what he refers to as 'negative philosophy' as a type of philosophical thinking, demonstrates the strength and originality of his late philosophy of mythology and revelation as something to be taken absolutely seriously. It is one of the most powerful moments in German Idealist thought. In 'The Difference Between Schelling and Hegel', S.J. McGrath begins by arguing against the still prevalent criticism of the work of Schelling as negatively 'Protean' in that he is constantly changing his position. While this has been taken to mean that Schelling lacked systematic prowess, for McGrath it shows how Schelling was a great philosopher of the real taken as a hidden ground that can always displace thinking—as something that thinking has to be ready to admit it can never master—like it could according to Schelling's rendering of Hegel. McGrath brings this point home by making a crucial distinction: although Schelling refuses *system building* in light of the fact that human rationality can only ever have a partial take on the whole of what is, he is nevertheless a decisively *systematic thinker* whose particular thought products are highly consistent on their own terms. McGrath then goes on to demonstrate that it is precisely in light of this distinction that Schelling proves his importance for us. For while contemporary philosophy similarly refuses system building, as seen in the standpoints of the obscurantist and the cynic, Schelling's philosophy, particularly of the late period, does not abjure reason even when it declares its intrinsic limitations at knowing reality. Schelling thereby develops a complex form of systematicity without system—rational claims that are open to reformulation in virtue of reality and the history of thinking itself—in which a genuine scientific humility for philosophical investigation can be found, the major features of which McGrath sketches with precision with recourse to the kenotic ontology that Schelling develops at the end of his career, which he saw as the consummation of his life's work.

In 'And Hence Everything is Dionysus: Schelling and the Cabiri in Berlin', Jason M. Wirth takes up the thematic of religion in Schelling's late philosophy of mythology and religion, which is broached in

McGrath's piece, to determine whether or not the latter's interpretation of Christianity can have any lasting relevance for us. Summoned to Berlin to take over Hegel's chair, Schelling's ascent was a highly anticipated event in the German intellectual scene. But the so-called positive philosophy offered a rethinking of the Christian God as historically developing out of the metaphysical potencies of being itself, a process that explicitly linked Christianity to times prior to Incarnation in Greek religion. Schelling traded the rationalism of what he called negative philosophy for a paradoxical form of thinking in which we, as Hölderlin already suggested, must await drunkenly for the coming gods—traded traditional argumentation for a literal expansion of consciousness that entails a new, sacred manner of inhabiting the earth. Such a move was not well received in his own time, as it is well known, and Wirth concludes by provocatively arguing how it might be the case that we are only truly ready to receive it now. In an age where we are destroying the very nature that gives us life, it is necessary for us to rethink the possibly religious dimensions of the great catastrophe that we face, for in so doing we may find novel solutions to it. By articulating a philosophical religion founded upon the fecundity and inexhaustible earth of existence, Schelling's late philosophy is of paramount importance.

The concluding article of this volume 'Beyond Modernity: The Lasting Challenge of German Idealism' by Konrad Utz is a retrospective take on the German Idealist tradition as a whole with an eye toward our contemporary philosophical problems. Utz maintains that German Idealism is the pinnacle of modernity because it takes its three major features—a growing concern for the irreducibility of the finite subject, the attempt to link together individualization and universalization, and human freedom—and articulates them into a philosophical system. Its great achievement, however, is also its great failure. For in trying to articulate a philosophical system, each of its representatives has a tendency to downplay the role of the particular metaphysically, ethically, and politically by an identification of the individual with the universal. Kant vividly demonstrates the problem: in giving myself the law, I become universal reason, which excludes the particular as that which is irreducibly in-between both the individual and the universal. Reacting against the system thinking of the German Idealists, what Utz refers to as

‘post-idealist modernity’ endeavors to flesh out the particular by means of concepts such as the pluralities of language-games, worlds, cultures, fields of sense, theories, and so on, irreducible to one another. For Utz, however, rethinking German Idealism in the aftermath of these concepts simply proves its lasting challenge: their own systems not only offer devastating criticisms of the various positions of post-idealist modernity in both its continental and analytical modes, but also demonstrate how we should not give up on the ideal of systematic philosophy so easily.

We hope that the reader has hereby surmised how, in bringing these texts together, we wish to exhibit the immense potential still left in German Idealism. It is not only a highly interesting historical event in human thinking, but it also continues to speak to us. The sheer multitude of topics here analyzed alone showcases some of many possible ways in which German Idealism does so. Our wager is that to see this we must be simply be ready to rethink this tradition by destroying old prejudices when necessary, the conceptual tools for which have been supplied by the ever-growing body of secondary literature on this tradition, its philosophical re-appropriations, and the ongoing work of the historical-critical editions. And this act of rethinking German Idealism is what each of the following contributors has done in his own way.

# 2

## Kant's Philosophy of Projection: The Camera Obscura of the *Inaugural Dissertation*

Constantin Rauer

### 1 Introduction

In what ways is Kant's philosophy alive for us today? Many have already raised this question. A widespread approach to answering this consists of turning to Kant's practical philosophy. One then demonstrates the ways in which the concepts found there are useful for contemporary ethics or politics: autonomy, respect for the law, cosmopolitanism, and so on. Another consists in turning to the very founding gesture of the critical philosophy itself. One then shows the ways in which his attack on traditional metaphysics gives voice to a staunch humility of philosophical thinking that is to be admired in face of the excesses of speculation. Left to its own devices, as Kant argues, reason can go astray.

In what follows, I will pursue a strategy similar to the latter approach. However, I would like to add something important that I believe has

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been overlooked in the reception of Kant, something that requires us to rethink Kant in a decisive manner and that allows us to readdress the question of the ways in which Kant's philosophy remains alive for us today. I will show how to understand Kant's own *Critique of Pure Reason* and fully appreciate its conclusions concerning the excesses of speculation, we must look to his pre-critical writings and in particular to how his *Inaugural Dissertation* arises from their concerns. For it is here that Kant for the first time outlines the problematic that will occupy him for the rest of his career, but with such a force that we have to grasp all that follows as a mature development of its themes.

In this regard, I argue that there is not so much of a split between the pre-critical and the critical Kant as one has sometimes supposed. This leads to a new, but more accurate understanding of the critical project—one that, albeit more accurate, is also more radical. Instead of simply demonstrating the ways in which thinking, when left to its own devices, is unable to make knowledge claims that it can validate because it moves beyond experience into a zone where thought becomes blind, the *Inaugural Dissertation* demonstrates how thought when performing logical judgments has a propensity for psychological projection and outlines the mechanisms of this projection. This preoccupation with projection continues into the *Critique of Pure Reason* and sheds light on exactly how thinking strays when outside of critical limits.

To establish that there is such a continuity, I will primarily reconstruct the *Inaugural Dissertation*. As I will describe, Kant here discovers three types of projection: (1) the projection of the subjective onto the objective, (2) the projection of the intelligible onto the sensitive, and (3) the projection of predicates onto a grammatical subject. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he points out three possible errors in logical judgments, a point that establishes the connection between the two texts: (1) the projection from the subject onto the object (*Amphiboly*), (2) the projection back from the subject onto the subject (*Paralogism*), and (3) the projection from the predicate onto the subject or the object (*Antinomy*).

The structural similarity is not accidental. Both are philosophies of projection. This entails that we should be wary about traditional accounts of the emergence of the Copernican revolution in theoretical worries concerning the foundation of science in light of Hume's skepticism.

Although Kant paints the picture of his development like this, a close examination of the genesis of his mature philosophy proves that there is more at stake.

My wager is that rethinking Kant in terms of the mechanisms of projection not only gives us a more accurate and radical understanding of the critical project. It also intimates a deeper, and indeed more striking, critique of the excesses of speculation. After Kant, speculation was, as is well known, all the rage for figures like Schelling and Hegel. They thought they could reinvent speculation so that it no longer succumbed to Kant's critique. Yet they could not have known the relationship between the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Inaugural Dissertation*. As such, they might not have resources to respond to the criticisms of the latter that are implicit in the former. And if speculation was given new life post-Kant, it has recently, after a long return to variations upon idealism in analytic philosophy of language and continental philosophy of discourse, been resurrected once again. We see it in certain strands of mathematically inspired metaphysics like in Badiou and Meillassoux. It is also evident in Latour's own actor-network theory. Furthermore, speculative realists, new realists, and new materialists abound. Analytic philosophers too are finding their own speculative paths. None of these people are afraid of 'going beyond experience,' of making 'thought blind' because they think they have found a way of rendering speculation possible outside of critical limits. But have they found a way of bypassing Kant's earlier, but related critique of the psychological projection involved in speculation?

## 2 A Brief History of the Text

In 1770, at the age of 46, Kant finally received an ordinary professorship at his native university. The appointment goes back to a promise made by the Prussian cultural administration already in 1764 as well as a change of positions prompted by Kant himself (cf. Kant to Friedrich II: 19 March 1770). His initiative would ultimately win Kant a professorship to his own taste for *Logic and Metaphysics*.

By 1770, Kant had defended, in total, three dissertations. Since he had written his last habilitation thesis 14 years earlier, however, a new defense

and therefore also a new habilitation thesis were required, both of course in Latin. The result was the *Inaugural-Dissertation: De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis*, translated in English as *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World*.

After having primarily treated psychological themes, such as ghosts, in the eight years prior, Kant returns to philosophy in its full extent in *De Mundi*. At the same time he no longer identifies philosophy, as he once had, with one of its side disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, or geometry, but with the field of reflection on thought itself, and hence with logic.

The extraordinarily difficult text, which is 38 pages and 30 paragraphs long in the original, should be seen as a link between the *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (1766) and the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). As Kant no longer published anything except for two marginal essays between the *Inaugural Dissertation* (1770) and the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), *De Mundi* is his last public document before the *Critique*. But the text is situated between the *Dreams* and the *Critique* not only chronologically, but also with regard to its content. After all, *De Mundi* draws the philosophical consequences of the *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* and thereby provides the first foundations for a critique of pure reason. Although the *Inaugural Dissertation* forms the first elaborated systematic outline of the later critique, some parts nevertheless contain pre-critical elements (e.g., § 22, in which God is seen as the cause of all existence). Kant expresses awareness of this ambiguity in a letter to Johann Heinrich Lambert on 2 September 1770. In this text, he states that the first and fourth sections of the Dissertation are insignificant and can thus be disregarded, while the second, third, and fifth sections permit further development. In fact, the fourth section especially is to be deemed pre-critical, whereas the second, third, and fifth sections can already be called critical.

An inconspicuous hint on the title page of the original edition should furthermore not elude us: 'The function of respondent [that is, the defense of the disputation] will be undertaken by Marcus Herz of Berlin, of Jewish descent, a student of medicine and philosophy.'<sup>1</sup> This reference as

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<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770 (TP)*, ed. and trans. David Walford in collaboration with Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 375; *Ak.*, 2: 385. Citations of Kant provide the pagination of the English translation followed by that of the *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussischen (later Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften,

well as Kant's correspondence with Marcus Herz immediately following the *Inaugural Dissertation* indicate that, as far as the religious basis for his philosophical thought is concerned, Kant will distance himself radically from pietism and be guided by the Jewish religion of law in the future. Although Kant has called Marcus Herz's 1771 response to his *Dissertation* a 'copy' of his own work (Kant to Friedrich Nicolais, 25 October 1770), Marcus Herz remains the sole person to whom Kant confided the further development of his *Critique* through the whole 1770s in correspondence.

In contrast, the dismissive responses by the figures of the Berlin enlightenment Johann Heinrich Lambert (see Lambert to Kant, 13 October 1770), Johann Georg Sulzer (see Sulzer to Kant, 8 December 1770), and Moses Mendelssohn (see Mendelssohn to Kant, 25 December 1770), who had each received a copy of the *Dissertation* from Kant, unsettled Kant to such an extent that he no longer divulged his critical thoughts publicly and thus also no longer published anything until the final completion of his *Critique* in 1781. Besides this, only a few copies of the dissertation were printed, and Kant remained resentful about his publisher's decision (Kant to Herz, 7 June 1771). Indeed, most errors in the reception of Kant could have been avoided if the *Inaugural Dissertation* had been accessible to the public from the start.

### 3 Logic and Projection

In *On the First Ground of the Distinction of Regions in Space* (1768), the treatise that preceded the *Inaugural Dissertation*, Kant had used analytic geometry in order to transfer the psychological concept of projection into the rational realm. While in the *Regions* (1) this application is only displayed exemplarily in a single object (space) and (2) in the *Inaugural Dissertation* this application is only transferred to a marginal area of philosophy (analytic geometry), the method of application is generalized and systematized through an investigation of the relations of projection proper to the central objects of philosophy itself.

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29 vols (Berlin: Georg Reimer [later Walter de Gruyter], 1900–). References to the Akademie edition are given by the abbreviation *Ak.*, volume and page number.

But what are these central objects of philosophy if Kant conceives of the discipline of philosophy as logic again? Already in his last logical treatise, *The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogistic Figures* (1762) from eight years earlier, Kant had enumerated the objects of logic. They consist in marks (predicates), judgments, and syllogisms about things. Already the first sentence of said text states that ‘to compare something as a characteristic mark with a thing is *to judge*. The thing itself is the subject; the characteristic mark is the predicate. The comparison is expressed by means of the copula *is* or *are*’ (TP, 89; Ak., 2: 47). And a little further down Kant states that ‘[e]very judgment which is made by means of a mediate characteristic mark is a syllogism. In other words, a syllogism is the comparison of a characteristic mark with a thing by means of an intermediate characteristic mark’ (TP, 90; Ak., 2: 48).

An example from the *Syllogistic Figures* (TP, 94; Ak., 2: 51):

| S = subject, O = object, P = predicate

P                      O

That which is rational is a mind.      | P has the mark O

S                      P

The human soul is rational.      | S has the mark P

S                      O

The human soul is a mind.      | Therefore S has the mark O

From a purely logical perspective this syllogism, an allusion to a Leibnizian dogma, is perfectly correct. Yet this inference could have already given Kant the analogical idea that S is projected onto O by means of P in this judgment. But Kant was barred from such a conclusion at the time he wrote the *Syllogistic Figures* (that is, in 1762) because on the one hand this syllogism moves exclusively within the domain of philosophical logic and because on the other hand he could not yet compare it to the psychological or geometric conception of projection in 1762. It was insignificant to a rationalist whether the things in question (souls and spirits) even have

real existence or whether judgments that are correct from a purely logical standpoint are even semantically meaningful. Although Kant is already conscious of this problem in 1762, the intrinsic logic of philosophical logic leaves him no choice but to approach the problem ironically.

An example from the *Syllogistic Figures*:

No fool is learned;

*So, no learned person is a fool;*

Some learned people are pious;

*So, some pious people are learned;*

Therefore, some pious people are not fools.

A syllogism of the second kind would run:

Every mind is simple;

Everything simple is imperishable;

Therefore, some of what is imperishable is a mind. (*TP*, 96–7; *Ak.*, 2: 54)

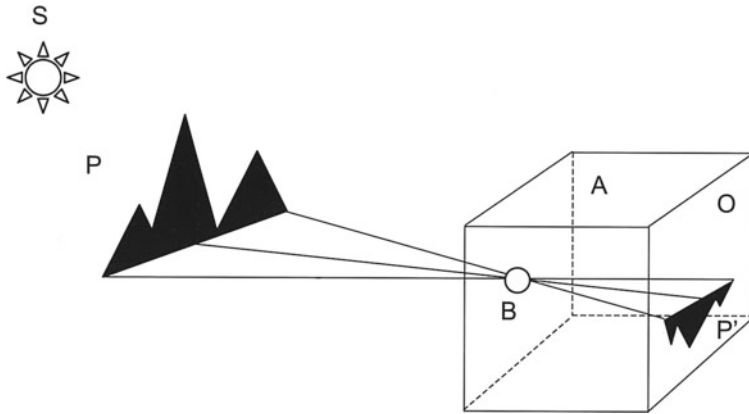
In contrast to the first syllogistic figure, the second one is fallacious because of a false ascription of the predicate ('for it is not the case that something is a mind simply in virtue of its being simple' [*TP*, 97; *Ak.*, 2: 54]). Nevertheless, Kant is unable to move from the logical fallacy to the idea of projection, precisely because this self-referential logic moves without exception within the circle of its own premises because of the rationalist bracketing of reality.

The idea of projection presupposes reference to an external position, though, which is alien to the self-referentiality of formal philosophical logic. Such an external position is, for example, considered in the psychoanalytic conception of projection with the dream screen and in the conception of projection of analytic geometry with the matrix of projection screens. Kant only recognizes such an exterior to philosophical logic in the differentiation of logical and real opposition in the *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy* (1763) in the year following *The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogistic Figures*. Then, as if by accident, Kant already describes the mechanism of projection in its different facets in the *Essay on the Maladies of the Head* (1764) the following year and in turn provides a theory thereof two years later in the *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics* (1766).

When Kant returns to logic with *De Mundi* in 1770, he finds himself in a new position compared to when he abandoned logic after the *False Subtlety* in 1762. Now he is not only in possession of a precise description of the psychological mechanisms of projection (since the *Maladies* of 1764) and a psychological analysis of said mechanisms (since the *Dreams* of 1766). He also knows that even a science as rational as analytic geometry has just such a conception of projection at its disposal (since *Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiations of Directions in Space* of 1768). Therefore, an investigation of philosophical logic, that is, the pure forms of thought itself, with a view to the inherent projections in logical judgments suggested itself. To clarify the meaning of *projections in logical judgments*, we shall analyze the concept of projection itself. To this end we refer back to how analytic geometry conceives of projection and analyze its component parts: What parts are necessary to grasp the idea of projection?

Even before an object can in fact be projected, a source of light that can illuminate everything is required (let us call this light S, for subject). Furthermore, a projection apparatus (A) is required, which is composed of on the one hand a lens or aperture (B) and on the other hand a projection screen (called O, for object). Only now does the object of projection (called P, for predicate) come into play. It is placed between the source of light (S) and the projection apparatus (A) in such a way that the shadow of the object of projection (P) appears virtually on the projection surface (O) as an image (let us call it P'). This composition can already be encountered in the oldest known projection apparatus, the *camera obscura* (see Fig. 2.1).

The idea of projection is therefore not divided into two components (S onto O), as is often erroneously assumed, but overall into five components (P is placed between S and B, such that P appears virtually as P' on O). Two of these four components are present *a priori* before the projection process (S and P), while the two others only come onto the scene through the projection apparatus (A) *a posteriori* (O as the real and P' as the virtual object). For example, if we employ a pink light source as the object of projection P, the represented object P' will appear pink to the observer on the projection surface O, although the really observed object (the surface of projection O) is in and for itself colorless. If we employ two different



**Fig. 2.1** *Camera Obscura*: '[lat.: dark chamber] the original form of the photographic camera described around 1500 by Leonardo Da Vinci among others. A box with a black interior and a transparent back wall, onto which a convex lens in the front (originally a simple pinhole; pinhole camera) projects a mirrored, upside-down image. In painting the camera obscura was used as an aid up until the 19th century, especially for the composition of landscapes and veduta' —Mayers *Konversations-Lexikon*. [A projection apparatus (here camera obscura), B aperture, lens, glasses (here simple pinhole), S subject, source of light (here the sun), P predicate, object of projection (here the mountains), O object, projection screen, canvas, dream screen (here wall), P' virtual predicate on the object (here mirrored image of the mountains)]

objects as P instead of the pink light source—on the one hand *the pure forms of sensible intuition* (that is, space and time) and on the other hand our *pure concepts of the understanding* (the categories)—we have already arrived at Kant's position in *De Mundi* in 1770.

A difficulty emerges when we compare the conception of projection of analytic geometry with the mechanism of projection in logical judgments—with which we shall familiarize ourselves imminently. Whereas in analytic geometry the object of projection P, which is projected, as well as the surface of projection O, onto which one projects, are theoretically both given before the projection process, philosophy must first find the criteria of classification over the course of the inquiry into its own mechanisms of projection.

A double difficulty results from this line of inquiry and the two-part structure of the *Inaugural Dissertation*, which is just the two-part structure



familiar to us from the *Dreams*, with the ‘Dreams of the Spirit-Seer’ on the one and the ‘Dreams of Metaphysics’ on the other hand. If Kant wants to prove in *De Mundi* that Leibniz is engaging in projection by considering space and time as predicates of substance, he must first prove that it is erroneous to ascribe these predicates in this manner. As a consequence, the *Inaugural Dissertation* is divided into a first analytic part and a second dialectical part. In the first part Kant indicates to which instance space and time are in fact to be ascribed (Sect. 3). In the second part the mechanisms of projection in logical judgments are laid bare and deconstructed (Sect. 5). Because (as concerns the question of what is projected onto what and in which direction) the dialectic thereby depends on the analytic and vice versa, everything depends on ‘what is earlier and what is later, that is to say, [...] what is cause and what is caused’ (*TP*, 399; *Ak.*, 2: 406). For example, are space and time features of substance, as Leibniz claims, or is substance, on the contrary, only a determinate form of our intuition of space and time, as Kant believes?

## 4 The Limits of *Logos*

What is at stake in the text, in which for the first time a *mundus intelligibilis* is meant to be systematically distinguished from a *mundus sensibilis*, is the determination of limits. In *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* of 1766 Kant had already drawn one such limit of human reason (*TP*, 354; *Ak.*, 2: 368) between a preceding, lawgiving, and thus *a priori* cognition and a succeeding, empirical, and thus *a posteriori* one. In the *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770 a second ‘limit [*terminus*]’ (*TP*, 399; *Ak.*, 2: 405) is added (and this again for the very first time in Kant’s work!) between phenomenon and noumenon, which is a limit between ‘things which are thought sensitively,’ thus ‘representations of things *as they appear*,’ and ‘things which are intellectual,’ thus ‘representations of things *as they are*’ (*TP*, 384; *Ak.*, 2: 392).

Yet there is no way to get from being to appearance and certainly no way to get from appearance to being, since the two are of completely different origins. This is, in fact, the most radical conclusion that Kant will for the first time draw in *De Mundi* from Swedenborg’s sensuous depiction of an *intelligible world* (as a ‘*mundo spirituali*’ through a ‘*mundo*

*fabulosum*' [TP, 397; Ak., 2: 404, emphasis added], that is, rationality as the spirit-world of fables). All further conclusions for a critique of pure reason will follow logically. There can be an '*intellectual intuition*' (TP, 389; Ak., 2: 396, emphasis added) in *neither* the sense in which something (objectively) intelligible could be cognized sensitively *nor* the sense that something (subjectively) intellective could possess such a sensitive organ of intuition. If, therefore, 'the concept of the intelligible as such is devoid of all that is given in human intuition' (ibid.), then it is the case that '[t]here is (for man) no intuition of what belongs to the understanding, but only a *symbolic cognition* [cognitio symbolica]' (ibid.).

In order to approach such a symbolic cognition of the intelligible, Kant draws the conclusion that immediately follows from the non-existence of intellectual intuition as well as the non-existence of an intuition of the intelligible. This consequence is just the limit between the phenomenon and noumenon first introduced in *De Mundi*.

Yet we can already indicate that the determination of this limit is a logical consequence of the idea of projection itself, as soon as the subjective projection apparatus of the observer (the projection apparatus A) is taken into account. If I agree with Kant that the perception of objects in time and space is not due to these objects themselves (the projection screen O), but due to the subjective constitution of the observer (the object of projection P, which only *appears virtually* as the image P' on the projection screen O), then I also must conclude, as Kant does in *De Mundi*, 'that things which do not accord with a fixed law of a certain subject do not, for that reason, pass beyond all understanding. For there could be an understanding, though certainly not a human understanding, which might distinctly apprehend [an infinite] multiplicity at a single glance' (TP, 379n; Ak., 2: 389n). Kant is referring here to an understanding that could count to infinity in one instant, unlike the human understanding, which requires time for this task and eventually has to cease the activity due to its own mortality. Still decades later Kant will explain this consideration of the observer's subjective projection apparatus in the following terms: 'without [external things] [the understanding] would be dead. But without understanding there would be no representations, without representations there would be no objects, and without objects its world would not exist. So, too, given another understanding, another world

would also exist, as the example of insanity makes clear' (*The Conflict of the Faculties*, XI 343 A 120 RRT 290).<sup>2</sup>

In other words, if I claim that certain forms of appearance of objects (time, space, and number) have nothing to do with these objects as such (the projection screen O), but should be traced back to our subjective intuitive apparatus (A), which make the objects of projection P only appear virtually as P' on the objects O, I also have to concede that intuitive apparatus (As) of a different constitution would perceive the same objects (Ps) differently (with other P's on the objects). It follows that we cannot state anything about the objects in and for themselves and beyond the projected P's. There are two consequences of this position:

On the one hand, the limit on the side of the subject between a *priori* cognition (from rational understanding and reason) and a *posteriori* (empirical) cognition from the *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* is duplicated in *De Mundi* on the side of the object in the distinction between phenomena and noumena. The second distinction is a logical consequence of the first. If space and time as well as rational concepts are intuitions and representations that are independent of experience (because they in turn structure experience in the first place), objects themselves must be free from the projections brought into them (time, space, number, and rational concepts). Therefore, I cannot make any claims about objects in and for themselves. Consequently, objects are only cognizable for us and only such as phenomena under consideration of our projections onto them.

On the other hand, this shift in approach also brings with it a shift in the appraisal of the observation. If the forms of objects (time, space, number, and rational concepts) no longer pertain to objects in and for themselves, but to our projection apparatus of sensibility and reason, it is reasonable to no longer consider the world of objects in and for themselves (onto-phenomenologically), but rather our own projection apparatus as the object of investigation (*critically*, which implies here a self-reflective investigation of the constitution of our sensibility as well as of our thought). A critique of a *rationis purae* follows from such a

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<sup>2</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Conflict of the Faculties*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 290; *Ak.*, 7: 71.

reflective investigation, as first mentioned in *De Mundi* (TP, 379; Ak., 2: 389). On the one hand, this critique entails the consideration of objects as a mirror of our intuitive and rational lenses, and thus as phenomena. On the other hand, it entails the consideration of things in and for themselves as free of everything intelligible. Later Kant will reverse this conclusion and consider *noumena* (intelligibility as such) independently of things themselves in his moral philosophy.

Kant wants to show in the dialectical part (Sect. 5) of his *Inaugural Dissertation* that the predicates that both rationalist and empiricist (and with both of these also Neoplatonic) philosophies ascribe to being itself are actually only added to being as 'something suppositious' (TP, 411; Ak., 2: 415). For according to Kant these predicates are not inherent to being (O), but rather to our sensible constitution of intuition and our intellectual constitution of reason (A), such that the objects (predicates P) are only projected as a virtual P' onto being (O) through the constitution of the subject. In other words: What appears to us in being is not in being but in us.

The *components of projection in philosophical judgments* result from the preceding consideration:

1. That onto which we project (the projection screen O) is being in philosophical judgments, the world of objects as such.
2. That which is projected (the object of projection P, which appears as P' on the projection screen O) in philosophical judgments are (a) our non-empirical forms of sensible intuition (time, space, and number) and (b) our rational concepts.
3. The subject S (for itself but not in itself), which provides the light of projection, is a position that is not yet treated and thought through in the *Inaugural Dissertation*. Later in the *Transcendental Deduction* of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, this S is traced back to the 'original-synthetic unity of apperception,'<sup>3</sup> which is a unity of consciousness grounded solely in the pure form of logical thought as such. It is grounded in an 'I think,' which can be qualified with no further predicative content (such as I-substance, identity, personality, or soul).

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<sup>3</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *CRP*], trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B 136.

Kant will later detect this symbolic cognition [*cognitio symbolica*]*—as repraesentatio—*at the point at which rationalist as well as spiritist metaphysics sensualized reason and substantialized it in the object of cognition. This symbolic cognition is on the one hand of the ‘transcendental object = X’ (*CPR*, A 109) that ‘must be thought of only as something in general = X’ (*CPR*, A 104). This is an X of which no longer a *cognitio essentia*, but only a *cognitio symbolica* is possible. On the other hand it is of the subject itself, which as transcendental subject only expresses ‘a Something in general’ (*CPR*, A 355). Therefore, it also can only be a *symbolon*, that is, a representing counterpart to the represented object, but not the latter itself. Conversely, Kant will now accord reason the position that was ignored completely by both (Neoplatonic) rationalism and (Neoplatonic) idealism. This is the projective position of the predicate P between subject and object.

We can already see here that Kant breaks through the Neoplatonic-theosophical system of immediacy and replaces it with a critical system of representation. The former system is a mystical-symbiotic melding of subject and object, which under complete ignorance of the projection apparatus (A) assumes an immediate identity of subject (S) and object (O) as well as an immediate identity of the represented (P through A) and that which represents (P’ onto O). According to this system of representation (*repraesentatio*), that which represents (P’ onto O) can never be identical to the represented (P through A) because of the limits (*termini*) that cross that which represents as well as the represented (*a priori/a posteriori* on the side of the subject and noumenon/phenomenon on the side of the object). Owing to these limits we cannot assume a substantial object in and for itself on the one side and a substantial subject in and for itself on the other, as the transcending system of projection (both A onto P and P’ onto O) is always already—*a priori*—located between them. Both the transcendental status of the object of cognition and of the cognizing subject emerges from this system of projection. Under consideration of the projections (virtual P’s) necessarily thrown onto it, the cognition of the transcendental object X always already aims at the alleged object in and for itself (that is, the cognition of the object as phenomenon). Similarly, under consideration of the projection apparatus (A) tied to the subject the transcendental subject is always already *a priori* more than what a subject could in and for itself contain substantially.

Just as the straight horizon turns into a spherical globe with increasing distance from the earth, Kant's bird's-eye view allows him to position his objects ever more precisely. It is one thing to know that both the projected objects (space, time, and the representations of understanding) and the object onto which one projects (being) are perceived differently under consideration of the relations of projection. It is another thing to know what occurs to the understanding and reason when they project in this manner. Therefore, one not only has to analyze the process of projection in logical judgments with respect to the objects affected by this process, but one also has to investigate the therein effective intellectual mechanisms of projection themselves.

## 5 The Projections in Logical Judgments

In order to find projections in logical judgments of philosophy, Kant puts a number of axioms in front of the *Camera Obscura* in the fifth and last section of his *Dissertation (On Method in Metaphysics)*. These axioms are the logical propositions of academic philosophy that Kant derived for the most part from Leibnizian dogmatics (axioms are indubitable first principles from which logical conclusions are drawn).

Kant divides the highest principles of philosophy, which he calls 'subreptic axioms' or 'illusions' (*praestigiae intellectus*, that is intellectual trickery [TP, 409; Ak., 2: 413]), in turn into three kinds of logical fallacies (§ 26). In all three kinds of illusion a displacement occurs as the sensitive conditions of human cognition are projected onto the 'conditions of possibility of an object.' He thus claims in § 26:

But all the illusions of sensitive cognitions, which masquerade under the guise of cognitions of the understanding and from which subreptic axioms arise, can be reduced to three species, of which the following may be taken to be the general formulae:

1. The same sensitive condition, under which alone the intuition of an object is possible, is a condition of the possibility itself of the object. (ibid.)
2. The same sensitive condition, under which alone it is possible to compare what is given so as to form a concept of the understanding of the object, is also a condition of the possibility itself of the object.

3. The same sensitive condition, under which alone some object met with can be subsumed under a given concept of the understanding, is also the condition of the possibility itself of the object. (ibid.)

In all three cases the identity between the *sensuous conditions* of the subject (that is, the lawlikeness of its intuitions) and the *conditions of possibility of the object* (that is, the laws that constitute the object) is asserted, so that it is possible to conclude from the first to the second, or to deduce the second from the first, immanently. From a logical perspective the sensuous conditions of the subject (the P of S) are taken to be predicates of being (as P of O). This false predicative ascription leads to a whole series of further logical fallacies. At the end of these fallacies we find, not by accident, the stopgaps that constitute the highest dogmas of metaphysics. Therefore, Kant will deconstruct all three aforementioned kinds of projection in detail: the first one in § 27, the second one in § 28, and the third one in § 29 of his *Dissertation*.

## The Projection of Pure Sensible Intuition onto Existence (De Mundi § 27)

This projection is evident in the following principle: ‘Whatever is, is somewhere and somewhen.’ (ibid.) There is also a weaker version of this proposition that runs as follows: ‘Whatever exists, *space and time are in it*; that is to say, every substance is *extended* and continuously changed’ (TP, 409n; Ak., 2: 414n). Both propositions are false because time and space are taken to be predicates of existence, or substance. The proposition should say the following to be correct: ‘whatever is somewhere [and somewhen], exists [*existit*]’ (TP, 408n; Ak., 2: 413n).

Kant had already proven in the analytic part of his *Dissertation* (in § 14 for time and § 15 for space) that time, just like space, is ‘*not something objective and real*, nor is it a substance, nor an accident, nor a relation,’ but rather a ‘subjective condition which is necessary’ for human sensitive perception, which means that it is a ‘pure intuition’ (TP, 393; Ak., 2: 400; see § 14, 5 for time and § 15, D for space). ‘Hence, it is

only in time that the possibility of changes can be thought, whereas time cannot be thought by means of change, only *vice versa*' (TP, 394; Ak., 2: 401). Kant had come to the same conclusion with regard to space in the *Regions* (1768). Although these non-empirical, that is, *pure* conditions of intuition (time and space) are tied to the constitution of the subject, they are not for this reason subjectivist but rather necessary (that is, lawful) intuitions, since 'simultaneous things as such' (TP, 395; Ak., 2: 401) for time and incongruent counterparts (TP, 396; Ak., 2: 403) for space form the 'foundation of all truth in outer sensibility' (TP, 398; Ak., 2: 404; cf. § 14, 6 for time and § 15, E for space). Therefore, the 'idea of time' and the 'concept of space' do not 'arise from but [are] presupposed by the senses' (TP, 391, 395; Ak., 2: 398, 402; cf. § 14, 1 for time and § 15, A for space). 'The possibility, therefore, of outer perceptions as such *presupposes* the concept of space; it does not *create* it. Likewise, too, things which are in space affect the senses, but space itself cannot be derived from the senses' (TP, 395; Ak., 2: 402). Precisely the same holds with regard to time. All this stems from the fact—therein lies Kant's strongest argument—that the representation of time and the concept of space are not universal, but singular representations (see § 14, 2 for time and § 15, B for space). Universal representations and concepts are combined out of partial representations and can consequently also be divided again into their parts through analysis. But just such an analysis is impossible for time and space. Because 'any part whatever of time is itself a time' (TP, 392; Ak., 2: 399) and because '*several places* are only parts of the same boundless space related to one another by a fixed position' (TP, 396; Ak., 2: 402), instants and points are not analytic parts of time and space, but indeed limits subjectively posited by the subject itself. 'For it is only when both infinite space and infinite time are given that any definite space and time can be specified by *limiting* [*limitando*]. Neither a point nor a moment can be thought in themselves unless they are conceived of as being in an already given space and time as the limits of that space and time' (TP, 399; Ak., 2: 405). From the fact that one can never reach a minimum of time or space through division (analysis) and that one can never reach a maximum of time or space through combination (synthesis), the problem of antinomy already emerges in *De Mundi*:



For it is hardly possible to conceive how the *never to be completed series* of the states of the universe, which succeed one another to *eternity*, can be reduced to a whole, which comprehends absolutely all of its changes. (*TP*, 382; *Ak.*, 2: 391)

For since nothing succeeds the whole series, and since, if we posit a series of things in succession, there is nothing, which is not followed by something else, except when it is last in the series, there will be something which is last for eternity, and that is absurd. (*ibid.*)

If time and space are projected onto substance and existence, however, a series of fallacies follows, and this just with regard to the apparent minimum and the apparent maximum. Such illusions all evidently attempt to gloss over the inconsistencies that result from a temporal and spatial conception of existence:

[I]t is impossible to express the extent of the delusion created by these shadows which flit before the understanding [of philosophers]. The *presence* of God is imagined to be *local*, and God is enfolded in the world as if He were contained all at once in infinite space, the intention being to compensate for this limitation, it would seem, by means of this local presence conceived *absolutely*, so to speak, that is to say, conceived as infinite. (*TP*, 410; *Ak.*, 2: 414)

Hence, the absurd questions with which they torment their spirits, for example, why did not God establish the world many centuries earlier? (*ibid.*)

This applies to the microcosm just as it does to the macrocosm: 'It is on this basis that there come to be bandied about [for example, with Leibniz' *slumbering monads*] those idle questions about the places in the corporeal universe of immaterial substances [...], about the seat of the soul, and about other questions of this kind' (*ibid.*). If time and space were in fact predicates of substance, or existence, some recourse to deceptive causalities would be indispensable in order to explain, for example, how temporality is introduced into substance, and how it is released again (through immaterial substances, souls, ghosts, and so on). Against this, Kant claims that 'the cause of the world is [...] not the soul of the world [*anima mundi*]; [the soul's] presence in the world is not local but

virtual' (*TP*, 403; *Ak.*, 2: 408). He borrows the concept of virtuality, which is decisive in relations of projection, from the famous mathematician Leopold Euler, to whose *Lettre à une princesse allemande* (3 vols, 1768–72) he refers repeatedly in *De Mundi* (see *TP*, 410, 415n; *Ak.*, 2: 414, 419n).

Yet 'once the concept of time [and of space] has been rightly understood'—and thus one has understood that time and space have nothing to do with substance and existence, but rather with the objective lawfulness of our sensible intuition—'all these problems [concerning God, soul and immortality] vanish like smoke' (*TP*, 411; *Ak.*, 2: 415).

## The Projection of Comparative Concepts onto Existence (*De Mundi*, § 28)

This projection is evident in two further principles: (a) 'Every actual multiplicity can be given numerically, and thus every magnitude is finite.' (b) 'Whatever is impossible, contradicts itself' (*ibid.*). Both propositions are false and should say the following to be correct: (a) 'The finite is measured as a magnitude; what can be given numerically is a real multiplicity.' (b) 'Whatever is simultaneously and is not, is impossible' (*TP*, 412; *Ak.*, 2: 416).

Let's take (a). In this projection, the concept of the understanding of countability is projected onto multiplicity, while the concept of magnitude is projected onto the finitude of being. In contrast to the first kind of projection, the concept of time is not immediately but mediately involved in the false ascription of the predicate, which nonetheless in no way facilitates the exposure of the projection at hand. For at least the human understanding requires time in order to measure the magnitude of a multiplicity. Therefore, the concept of multiplicity 'never reaches completion unless the synthesis can be achieved in a finite time. Hence, it is that an *infinite series* of co-ordinates cannot be comprehended distinctly because of the limits of our understanding. Thus, by the fallacy of subreption, such a series would appear impossible' (*TP*, 411; *Ak.*, 2: 415). A subjective condition of human existence, its finitude in time, is therefore transferred into existence as such, as the 'dependence of the whole' (a subjectively

necessary concept of human cognition) is ‘mistakenly supposed to be identical’ with the ‘measurability of the series’ (that is, of the objective magnitude of existence) (ibid.).

A similar projection is at play when one tries to conclude from the composed to the ‘principles of composition, that is to say, simples,’ that is, *monads*. In this case the representation also suffers ‘from the undoubted blemish of the origin’ (*TP*, 412; *Ak.*, 2: 416), as one treats the ‘subjective conditions of judging as objective’ (ibid.). That we cannot reach a part smaller than the smallest through division is not due to the subsistence of substance but due to our subjective power of division.

It is not by accident that the projections of comparative concepts onto existence (monads microcosmically and the finitude of the universe macrocosmically) concern the minimum and the maximum in being. For if one could in fact ascribe the concept of the understanding of measurability to existence (as its predicate), existence would have to follow the same laws as this concept. It would therefore have to be limitable to a beginning and an end. ‘But that the universe, in respect of its mass, is mathematically finite, that its past duration can be given according to a measure, that there is a definite number of simples constituting any body whatsoever—these are propositions which openly proclaim their origin in the nature of sensitive cognition’ (ibid.) and which thereby divulge their projective character.

Let’s take (b). ‘But as the second subreptic axiom [that is, “whatever is impossible, contradicts itself”]: it arises from the rash conversion of the principle of contradiction’ (ibid.), as the *principle of contradiction* is transferred onto possibility as such, that is, existence (*Existenz* and *Dasein*), and thereby *logical contradiction* is projected onto the *real ground of actuality*. The concept of time is also subtly involved in this false judgment. The principle of contradiction only holds when two predicates contradict each other *at the same time*. The principle of causality, on the contrary, according to which an A is removed through a B in temporal succession, is not contradictory at all. Here one can also not conclude to the real existence of an object from a correct logical proposition:

This [the attachment of the concept of possibility, that is, existence, to logical thought], indeed, is in the highest degree true for the laws by which the

human understanding is constrained and limited; [...]ut, by treating the subjective conditions of judging as objective [that is, due to wild projection], the conclusion is rashly drawn that, in such a case, no judgment of impossibility is open to any understanding at all, and, accordingly, that *whatever does not involve a contradiction, is, therefore, possible*. (ibid.)

In order to, in turn, gloss over the logical contradiction between the principle of contradiction and the real ground of existence, a kind of intermediate concept is employed, which is the Neoplatonic concept of more or less pneumatic forces. We can refer to Lavater's *organic force*, Herder's *ascending force*, as well as Hegel's *dialectical sublation*. These chimaeras serve to project logical contradiction onto the causality of the real. 'This is why so many vain fabrications of I know not what *forces* are invented at pleasure. Freed from the obstacle of inconsistency, they burst forth in a horde from any architectonic mind, or, if you prefer, from any mind which inclines to chimaeras' (ibid.). This multitude of spectral forces is used to harmonize the contingency of the actual with the necessity of thought, which amounts to a philosophical autism. For:

It follows that the possibility of each force *does not rest upon the identity* of cause and caused, or of substance and accident. And thus it also follows that the impossibility of falsely fabricated forces *does not depend upon contradiction alone*. One may not, therefore, accept any originary force as possible unless *it has been given by experience*; nor can its possibility be conceived a priori by any perspicacity of the understanding. (*TP*, 412–3; *Ak.*, 2: 416–417)

## The Projection of the Concept of the Understanding of Necessity onto Existence (De Mundi § 29)

This projection is evident in the following subreptic axiom: 'Whatever exists contingently, at some time did not exist' (*TP*, 413; *Ak.*, 2: 417). This proposition is false, because the concept of the understanding of necessity is considered a predicate of existence here. The proposition should say the following to be correct: 'Whatever at some point was not, is contingent' (ibid.).

This logical fallacy also stems from a projection of logical contradiction onto the real ground of actuality, as ‘this supposititious principles arises from the poverty of the understanding, which generally clearly sees the nominal characteristic marks of contingency or necessity, but [in contrast] rarely the real characteristic marks’ (ibid.). It, too, is an instance of a converse proposition. Instead of the correctly grasping the contingency of existence as something that does not have the least connection to the necessities of thought and that therefore cannot be derived from the latter, one concludes from necessity (*necessitatis*) to contingency (*contingentiae*) erroneously. For ‘changes are more reliable witnesses of contingency than contingency is of changeability’ (ibid.). ‘For, although this world exists contingently, *it is everlasting*, that is to say, it is simultaneous with every time, so that it would, therefore, be wrong to assert that there has been a time at which it did not exist’ (TP, 413–4; Ak., 2: 417), in order to then have recourse to a golden age, paradise, or nirvana and their respective regressions.

Why, though, does philosophy project the limits of human cognition onto the world of things in this way? Kant offers two responses to this question. The first locates the answer in a subjective and the second in an objective factor.

The subjective—psychologically empirical—reason for why philosophy engages in such projections lies in the ‘philosophy of the lazy [*philosophiae pigrorum*],’ which ‘by appealing to a first cause, declares any further enquiry futile’ (TP, 400; Ak., 2: 406). If we look back to the subreptic first principles we have just presented and wonder what ‘first cause’ Kant is referring to, we come up against the hinges of Neoplatonism and theosophy. In both Leibniz’ rationalism and Swedenborg’s spiritism these hinges are places at which the intelligible acquires its sensible locations. These are just the locations of ‘the community of the soul with an organic body’ (CRP, A 384), at which reason melds with the object into a symbiotic unity.

There are supposed to be three such links between the spiritual and the corporeal (at least according to the Neoplatonic-theosophic conception):

1. Microcosmically there are (in Swedenborg) *inner spirits*, (in Leibniz) *monads*. Slumbering monads are intelligent immaterial substances, which enter matter and leave it again (Plotinus’ *individual soul*).

2. Macrocosmically there is the protecting Lord above all, for example, Swedenborg's *homo maximus* or Leibniz' *divine providence, the principle of pre-established harmony*, and so on, through which the being of the whole is held together as a unity in the whole of being (Plotinus' *universal soul*).
3. Between this microcosmic intelligibility of bodies and the macrocosmic body of the intelligible, Neoplatonic-theosophic philosophy posits a series of (ascending) pneumatically active forces, which pantheistically summon the ever same spirit in all and each by means of analogical morphologies (*correspondentia* in Swedenborg; the *principle of sufficient reason* in Leibniz; Plotinus' *world soul*).

Here we see how in all three sensualizations of the intelligible (that is, [1] the monads and the souls that hold sway in them, [2] the whole of being and the Lord who watches over it, as well as [3] the pneumatic powers, or spirits, which mediate as messengers between soul, matter, and God) reason is substantialized into its objects of intuition. Conversely, one then attempts to deduce reason from being itself through a sort of *physiognomy of the intelligible*.

We see furthermore that Kant purposefully searches out and deconstructs these substantializations of the intelligible in the material, the 'theosophical dreams'<sup>4</sup> of 'intermediate thing[s] between matter and thinking beings' (*CPR*, B 270/A 222) in the first principles of philosophy. He does this in order to show that metaphysics, with its first and last causes and *the substantializations of the intelligible in existence*, only attests to the 'illusion of science' (*M. Immanuel Kant's Announcement of the Programme of His Lecture for the Winter Semester 1765–1766*, in *TP*, 293; *Ak.*, 2: 307) that holds sway in 'the very recesses of metaphysics' (*TP*, 415; *Ak.*, 2: 419).

Nevertheless the reason for philosophical projections not only lies in the subjective sloth and laziness of philosophy, but also—at least partly—objectively in the very nature of the issue at hand. As an explanation, Kant mentions a further kind of projection in § 30 of his *Dissertation*.

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<sup>4</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 239; *Ak.*, 5: 123.

This is a form of projection, which ‘like the principles which have been enumerated by us above, [...] rest[s] on subjective grounds, not, it is true, on the laws of sensitive cognition, but on the laws of the cognitions which belongs to the understanding itself. In other words, they rest on the conditions under which it seems to the understanding itself easy and practical to deploy its own perspicacity’ (*TP*, 414; *Ak.*, 2: 418). Here *subjective judgments* of the understanding are projected onto *objective reasons*.

## The Projection of Subjective onto Objective Reasons (De Mundi § 30)

The following are examples for this kind of projection: (a) All things in the universe take place in accordance with the order of nature (*ibid.*). (b) Principles are not to be multiplied beyond what is absolutely necessary (*TP*, 415; *Ak.*, 2: 418). (c) Nothing material at all comes into being or passes away (see *ibid.*).

Let us begin with the last example (c). This dogma is ‘spread abroad through all the schools of the philosophers’ (*ibid.*), but it is in fact Neoplatonic and described by Leibniz as the *principle of pre-established harmony*. It is not accepted because ‘it has been taken as discovered or demonstrated by *a priori* arguments,’ but rather because ‘if you concede that matter itself is in flux and transitory, there would be nothing left at all which was stable and enduring, which would further advance the explanation of phenomena in accordance with universal and constant laws’ (*ibid.*). Consequently, this principle only presupposes a subjective necessity of thought, according to which one concludes from a hypothetical whole to constancy and from the latter to necessity, that is, lawfulness. The order of the whole, which is subjectively necessary, is thereby projected onto the laws of the world, although the proposition is merely hypothetical and without empirical evidence or reasonable proof.

The same holds for the second proposition (b)—the Leibnizian *principle of sufficient reason*), which ‘we support [...], not because we clearly see, either by reason or by experience, a causal unity of the world; we are rather driven to search for it by an impulsion of our understanding, which only deems itself to have been successful in the explanation of

phenomena if it finds itself able to descend from a single first principle to a number of things determined by that ground' (ibid.). The 'well-known predilection for unity, which is the characteristic of the philosophical mind' (ibid.), leads on the one hand to the *formal* projection of *analysis into synthesis* and on the other hand to the projection of a subjective need of grounding into a *causal unity of the world* (which is in the end neither micro- nor macrocosmically accessible).

Similarly, the first proposition (a) is accepted not because the order of nature is completely known to us, but only because we do not want to have recourse to '*comparative miracles*, such as the influence of spirits' (TP, 414; Ak., 2: 418) in order to explain what is still unknown. Hence, we think it necessary to presuppose a certain natural order as given.

As we can see, the last kind of projection differs considerably from the *philosophy of the lazy*, as here actual, although subjective, necessities lead to philosophical propositions that are false, or at least not susceptible to proof or evidence.

We hope thereby to have adequately retraced the way in which Kant applies the conception of projection that was drawn from empirical psychology—and subsequently further developed on the basis of analytic geometry—to the principles of philosophy in order to lay bare the *processes of projection in logical judgments*. Yet Kant is not satisfied with the exposure of the aforementioned kinds of projection, but, in turn, he reduces these four kinds to overall three kinds of *mechanisms of projection* in logical judgments.

## 6 The Three Types of Projection in Logical Judgments

Indeed, all four kinds of projection identified above fall under one common type of projection, as all four kinds of subreptic axioms *transpose the subjective onto the objective*. We also find paranoid causal overextension and the splitting of the subject in this form of projection.

All four kinds of projection listed above are characterized by a *transposition* that consists in 'treating the subjective conditions of judging as



objective' (*TP*, 412; *Ak.*, 2: 416). With the first kind of projection, the subjective conditions of sensible intuition, that is, time and space, are projected onto the substance (of things). With the second and third kind of projection, the subjective concepts of the understanding of measurability, possibility, and necessity are likewise projected onto objective existence (of magnitude, existence, and contingency). The same can be said of the fourth kind of projection, in which subjectively necessary rules of the understanding are projected onto objective laws of nature.

Most of these projections are, however, also based on an erroneous—if you will, antinomial—logical inference as a 'rash conversion' (*ibid.*) of logical propositions is performed, that is, the *logically converse proposition* is drawn. For example, the correct proposition that 'whatever at some point was not, is contingent' turns into the false proposition that 'whatever exists contingently, at some time did not exist,' as the predicate (contingency) is declared the subject and, conversely, the subject (existence) is declared the predicate. The proposition is causally overextended and is therefore also a paranoid proposition.

Furthermore a *paralogistic exchange of the subject* (which consists in the exchange of the subject with its object of intuition) is hidden beneath these paranoid converse propositions (which consist in the exchange of the subject with its predicates). These converse propositions—which are allegedly supposed to establish some objectivity—in particular show that *logical projection eliminates the position of the subject* (S). After this *exchange of subject*, the purportedly objective predicates (as the specter of a necessity located within existence, from which contingency is supposed to follow) stand without subject in frictionless space-time, whereas, conversely, *the subject* itself—where the cause counts as caused and the effect as effective—is *degraded to a predicate of predicates*. All philosophical fables about spirits eventually lead to the following: *Where ego was, there id shall be*. According to this logico-metaphysical puppetry (of the *mundus spirituum* over the ego), the subjectivity of the subject haunts about in somnambulance (cf. Hermann Broch's *The Sleepwalkers*).

Finally Kant could demonstrate with regard to the first three kinds of projection that (subjectively) sensitive representations are projected onto what is (objectively) intelligible, as 'what is sensitive and what derives from the understanding are improperly mixed together, like squares and

circles' (*TP*, 410; *Ak.*, 2: 414). For Kant, this 'confusion of what belongs to the understanding with what is sensitive [is] the *metaphysical fallacy of subreption* [an *intellectuated phenomenon* (that is, *something sensitive that is intellectualized*), if the barbarous expression may be pardoned]' (*TP*, 408; *Ak.*, 2: 412). Later in the *Critique of Pure Reason* this *confusion of noumenon and phenomenon will be called an amphiboly*. This philosophical transposition is first defined in *De Mundi* (although without its later name) as the 'taking [of] the limits, by which the human mind is circumscribed, for the limits within which the very essence of things is contained' (*TP*, 379; *Ak.*, 2: 389).

Let us contrast the following three type of projection with the empirical forms of projection from the *Essay on the Maladies of the Head* (1764) and the *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (1766):

1. of the subjective onto the objective,
2. of the intelligible onto the sensitive, and
3. of the predicate onto a grammatical subject.

We discover a schematism, according to which the first type of projection (of the transfer of the subjective onto the objective) is analogical to the *transposition*, or transfer, of the *focus imaginarius* in the world of objects. The second type of projection (of the transfer of the intelligible onto the sensitive) is analogical to the *splitting of the subject*, or the confusion of unconscious representations with conscious ones. Finally, the third type of projection (of the transfer of the predicate onto the grammatical subject) is analogical to *paranoia*, or to the puppetry of being.

This schematism is astonishing since, at least from a formal perspective, we encounter the same errors of cognition in *De Mundi* on the side of the philosophy of the lazy as on the side of the mentally ill in psychiatric hospitals, which Kant had portrayed six years earlier in his *Essay on the Maladies of the Head*. Projection, which is the *derangement of philosophy*, consists in taking subjective for objective conditions of judgment. In *schizophrenia*, which is the *insanity of philosophy*, the rational faculty is rendered cacophonous through a hodgepodge of intelligible things made sensitive. *Paranoia*, which is the *dementia of philosophy*, lies in the transformation of subjects

into puppets and of predicates into *homini maximi* through the drawing of a logically converse proposition.

Although Kant already recognizes the error of subreption proper in the *splitting of the subject* in *De Mundi*, this second type nevertheless remains the least developed one. Later in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, especially in the B edition of 1787, this second type, called *paralogism*, will occupy the most space.

In *De Mundi* Kant has an already quite elaborate conception of the third type, which is the *paranoia of philosophy* and which will later be called antinomy in the *Critique*. He knows wherein the error on the side of the subject lies. We conclude from thought to cognition and fall prey to the superstition that representations are already real and that we can actually get hold of the real thanks to the omnipotence of thought. Freud called this mania the '*Allmacht der Gedanken*,' the impotence of thought. Kant knows wherein the error on the side of the object lies. It is brought about by a *causal overextension* due to drawing the logically converse proposition, in which the predicate is transposed into the position of the subject and vice versa. Finally, he already enumerates the objects affected by this paranoid philosophical thought in *De Mundi*, which are *simple substances*, or *monads* (cf. the second antinomy), as well as the limitation of time and space through *beginning* and *end* (cf. the first antinomy). While the third antinomy, which treats the concept of freedom, and the fourth antinomy, which treats of the concept of God, are not yet mentioned explicitly in *De Mundi*, they are indicated in the deconstruction of the concept of necessity.

Without a doubt, the first type is most extensively treated by Kant in *De Mundi*. According to this *transposition of philosophy*, the first principles of metaphysics, which are the onto-phenomenological descriptions of the essence of being as such, turn out to be all wild projections. Kant had a clear idea about what error is committed on the side of the subject. The *subjective conditions of judgment are considered to be objective*. He also mentions the resulting error on the side of the object, which is the *confusion of noumena and phenomena*. This confusion occurs as the limits that enclose the human cognitive power are confused with the limits that enclose the essence of things themselves. Finally, he also reveals the objects that are affected by the transposition of philosophy. These are on

the one hand time and space and on the other hand our pure concepts of the understanding, which are projected onto being arbitrarily.

## 7 A New Critique of Metaphysics

We have seen how Kant's *Inaugural Dissertation* provides a complex 'taxonomy' of the mechanisms of psychological projection in logical judgment. It articulates the dynamic by which thinking can err when beyond critical limits, a dynamic implicit in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Although Kant himself was only concerned with the speculative excesses of what will later be known as pre-critical or dogmatic metaphysics, epitomized in figures such as Leibniz and Swedenborg, I would like to suggest that there are resources in his philosophy that force us to be wary of Kant's immediate successors and recent develops in metaphysics. What is at stake is more than thinking beyond experience in which thought becomes blind, but mechanisms of psychological projection to which even speculative methods, both past and present, can easily succumb.

Metaphysics before Kant (Leibniz, Swedenborg) and German Idealism after Kant (Schelling, Hegel) have much in common. They both share, above all, Neoplatonic-theosophical characteristics, and they both mainly project the subjective onto the objective, the intelligible onto the sensitive, and the predicative onto the subjective. For instance, the Schelling from the identity-philosophy onward declares an identity of the subjective and the objective, so that there is never a pure object that is not without a modicum of subjectivity. This is at the heart of his theories of potencies in both his philosophy of nature and late philosophy of mythology and revelation. But can we be sure that is not a projection of the intelligible onto the sensitive? We already mentioned above the ways in which we can construe Hegel's theory of dialectical sublation in terms of projection. It also works for other Hegelian concepts like the inner reason to history, the thesis that there is a divine providence that works through it. Is this not similarly projecting the subjective onto the objective? How can we be sure that neither is engaged in irrational procedures?

In this regard, Kant is one of the most significant critics of post-Kantian idealism *avant la lettre*. He cautions us to be careful of such philosophies

no matter the sophisticated methods they have developed to bypass critical limits (intellectual intuition, positive philosophy, presuppositionless thinking). But this suggests that Kant would be just as critical of more recent developments in speculation and that he already has in his possession tools for a substantial critique of them. Would he not be inclined to think that the mathematically inspired metaphysics of Badiou and Meillassoux were simply performing the kind of ‘rash conversion’ (*TP*, 412; *Ak.*, 2: 416) of logical propositions through which philosophical principles traditionally became established through a fallacious exchange of subject and predicate? This danger is certainly one that Kant makes real. He could also put into question some analytic metaphysics, like that of Lewis, on the same grounds. And would he also not think that Latour’s network theory, too, is ultimately a kind of substantialization of the intelligible in the material, just another variation of the ‘theosophical dreams’ in which there are ‘intermediate thing[s] between matter and thinking beings’ (*CPR*, B 270/A 222)? If so, various types of speculative realism, new realism, and new materialism—insofar as they also argue for a plurality of interactive material, ‘vital’ forces in being—would run a similar risk for him. While none of these new speculative positions have sought to naively ignore the critical limits Kant placed on thinking (just like Schelling and Hegel, they have sophisticated methods), rethinking Kant’s critical philosophy through the *Inaugural Dissertation* serves to strengthen his own position and in the process highlights the potential irrationality of all speculative positions that come after him. Although I can only make these points polemically and in passing here, it is sufficient to demonstrate the extent to which Kant is indeed relevant today because he offers, just as much as ever, a lasting challenge to the future of speculation.

# 3

## The Meaning of Transcendental Idealism in the Work of F.W.J. Schelling

Alexander Schnell

### 1 Introduction

In the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), which of course only represents one well-confined moment of his work taken as a whole, Schelling develops a completely original picture of transcendental idealism. This appears simultaneously as an interpretation and radicalization of the transcendental philosophy first provided by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (and the transcendental knowledge that it implements) and as a critique of Fichte's transcendental idealism as developed in different versions of the Jena *Science of Knowledge*. In what follows, I would like to outline the transcendental idealism specific to Schelling by reconstructing its genesis and presenting its essential content, with the intention of determining in what ways it may still be relevant to contemporary debates.

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This may seem counterintuitive to some. Today all so-called ‘philosophies of the subject’—which, in some sense, saw their heyday in the transcendental philosophies of the above-mentioned figures, but were in their way continued in the phenomenological tradition of the twentieth century—have fallen into disrepute. Faced with the necessity of taking into account the arguments posed against correlationism (elaborated by the ‘speculative realism’ of Meillassoux), the strength of the newly emerging ontologies in anthropology (introduced by the anthropologist Descola), the ‘hard problem’ of consciousness (developed by Chalmers), the independent life of objects or reality (Harman, Gabriel, and others)—to name just some of the main trends in which we are engaged—philosophies of the subject have indeed persisted in the forefront of philosophical debate, but only as a critical foil against which these new positions can articulate themselves. Everyone is determined to leave the subject behind for the real. But perhaps the philosophies of the subject needed this challenge to see both their own importance and come into their own. I say ‘importance’ because they teach us that realism should not be naïve or dogmatic. We cannot just return to pre-Kantian metaphysics, no matter how interesting these metaphysics may be. Nonetheless, the challenge of these new realisms shows that we need a more robust notion of the real *within* philosophies of the subject. Only in this way can they adequately do their task. But if previous endeavors of transcendental philosophy and phenomenology have failed to explain how we can have ‘access’ to a real ‘beyond’ us in a sufficient manner, where can we find additional resources? How can we meet the challenge?

My thesis is that turning to Schelling’s *System of Transcendental Idealism* in this context may prove helpful. This is because Schelling—responding to the subjectivism of Fichte’s *Science of Knowledge*, according to which all reality is conceived as arising from the ego—attempts to delineate a new transcendental philosophy in which the experience of reality as independent from the ego is given its due, all the while respecting the transcendental constraints in a way more consistent than Kant did. Structurally speaking, Schelling is concerned, to put it in more contemporary terms, with the possibility of the *transcendental genesis* of ‘transcendence’: how something can be experienced as autonomous from us, even if it is nonetheless ‘posited’ by us. This is an interesting, underappreciated moment

in the history of transcendental philosophy that has parallels with the needs of any contemporary philosopher of the subject who wishes to stay committed to the subjective conditions of the legitimation of knowledge, but who also wishes to be a realist in a strong sense. For even if Schelling fails to meet the challenge by today's standards of what counts as 'reality,' his failure could help us find a way to think transcendence 'critically.' We learn from mistakes just as much as success. Let's now turn to an exegetical reconstruction of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, before reflecting on the lessons it teaches us in the concluding section.

## 2 On Transcendental Knowledge

In his famous letter to Hegel, dated 6 January 1795, Schelling famously wrote: 'Philosophy is not yet finished, Kant has given the results; the premises are still lacking. And who could understand results without the premises?'<sup>1</sup> It is clear that these 'results' are those of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which had established the *a priori* conditions of knowledge and its limitations. But what exactly is meant by '*a priori* conditions of knowledge'? And, above all, what are these 'premises' that Schelling aims for?

The reception of post-Kantian transcendental philosophy usually considers the major contribution of Kantian transcendental idealism to consist in the in-depth determination and legitimation of the 'synthetic unity of the transcendental apperception' (= the transcendental ego) as the principle and 'highest point' (emphasized in the 'Transcendental Deduction of the Categories') of transcendental philosophy, a legitimation that had not been provided satisfactorily by Kant. Several post-Kantian philosophers have indeed pointed out a peculiar difficulty in Kant's text: The transcendental ego cannot be known 'to exist' in the strict sense, since existence is a category of modality and cannot, therefore, be applied to the principle that is beyond, or rather falls short of, any possible experience (the only place where the categories have legitimate use). Kant himself wrote—as Schelling acutely noted in the *Abhandlungen zur*

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<sup>1</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Briefe und Dokumente*, vol. II, ed. H. Fuhrmans (Bonn: Bouvier, 1962–1975), 57.



*Erläuterung des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre* (*Essays in Explanation of the Idealism of the Science of Knowledge*) (1796 and 1797)<sup>2</sup>—that the ‘I think’ (the ‘I’ being a ‘purely intellectual representation’) implies a mode of existence that is ‘not yet a category, which is not related to an indeterminately given object, but rather to an object of which one has a concept, and about which one wants to know whether or not it is posited outside this concept.’<sup>3</sup> Consequently, it is a question of knowing what type of ‘existence’ is to be attributed to the transcendental ego.

Commentators of post-Kantianism in general, and of Fichte and Schelling in particular, understand and interpret Fichte’s and Schelling’s efforts, marked with the intention of providing the missing ‘premises,’ as an attempt to clarify the status of the highest principle of Kantian philosophy, now reinterpreted as the ‘absolute ego.’ The subsequent development of these two thinkers continues in this manner until they move away from this initially shared project, moving toward a philosophy of absolute being (for Fichte), or of identity (for Schelling), and then later in even other directions. I would like to propose here an alternate interpretation of these ‘premises,’ one that will allow me to define the status of transcendental idealism in Schelling’s work in an extremely precise manner, and then offer some critical reflections on what lessons can be learned from it.

To do this, we must recall Kant’s definition of transcendental knowledge: ‘I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our mode of cognition of objects insofar as this is to be [*sein soll*, or ‘ought to be’] possible *a priori*’ (*CPR*, B25). This definition clearly implies three senses of the concept of knowledge. First is the knowledge of objects, which Kant leaves aside because this knowledge is not the subject matter of transcendental philosophy, but instead of the particular sciences. Second is the type of knowledge—‘how we know’ objects—which must be possible *a priori*. More exactly, it is not a

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<sup>2</sup> *SW*, I/1, 401 ff. Citations of Schelling provide the pagination of the English translation if one exists, followed by that of the *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, vols 14, ed. Karl Friedrich August Schelling (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J. G. Cotta, 1856–1861). References to the K.F.A. Schelling edition are given by the abbreviation *SW*, division, volume and page number.

<sup>3</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *CRP*], trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B423.

question of knowledge that is possible *a priori*, but knowledge that shows the *necessary* conditions of the possibility of all knowledge (hence, the use of the verb 'ought [*sollen*]'). Finally, there is a third type of knowledge, namely the one that occupies itself with the second, which intends it and which, in particular, must legitimize it.

This reading of the *Critique of Pure Reason* suggests that the second and third types of knowledge *are confused* in this work, most notably in the chapter on the 'Transcendental Deduction of the Categories' that is at its heart and core. It is, in fact, through the production of the *a priori* conditions of all knowledge (that is, time and space, the categories, and the famous synthetic unity of transcendental apperception) that all knowledge is founded<sup>4</sup> and legitimized according to Kant.<sup>5</sup> Now, this reduction of the legitimation of knowledge to the mere production of the *a priori* conditions of knowledge (albeit suspended in the 'transcendental ego') did not satisfy Schelling. Kant, of course, masterfully identified (in the second Preface to the first *Critique*) that it is the discovery of an *a priori* element that raises a discipline looking to produce knowledge to the rank of a science. But it is one thing to pose and establish the *a priori* conditions of knowledge (as does Kant) and quite another to explain what gives an *a priori* condition its *a priori* character (which remains to be done by Schelling). And we must in no case confuse the second and third types of knowledge. Here, then, are the 'results' of Kant's transcendental philosophy: the identification of the *a priori* conditions of knowledge with regard to their content; the following are the missing premises: the attainment of the 'knowledge' that ultimately legitimizes our understanding of and that fully justifies its *a priori* character.

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<sup>4</sup> This foundation is completed with the identification of the 'transcendental schema' in the chapter on the Schematism.

<sup>5</sup> At the very end of the Deduction of 1787, when, in a 'brief summary,' he recapitulates the fundamental objective of this chapter, Kant explicitly states that the deduction of the categories consists in the 'presentation [*Darstellung*]' of the determination of the phenomena in space and in time in general 'from the principle of the **original** synthetic unity of apperception as the from of understanding in relation to space and time as the original forms of sensibility' (CRP, B169). He asserts here, focusing on the extreme deduction delivered in paragraphs 24–26, that the synthetic unity of transcendental apperception refers originally to time and space, and, in particular, that it is this connection that first makes it possible that all sensible intuitions are subject to the categories as the only conditions under which the manifold can be synthesized in consciousness.

It is quite remarkable that it is still Kant's definition of transcendental knowledge that—despite the fact that its 'premises are still lacking'—indicates the path to be taken and, furthermore, that by taking as one's point of departure a common reinterpretation (but a fundamentally different implementation) of this definition, it is possible to characterize the specificity of Schelling's transcendental idealism on the one hand and that of Fichte on the other. So what is this common reinterpretation of transcendental philosophy?

Transcendental knowledge deals—in this reinterpretation—with what makes *a priori* knowledge *possible*. Now, what characterizes this apriority is that the universality and, above all, the *necessity* of knowledge depend on this connection between the *necessary* and the *possible*—more exactly, between the *categorical* and the *hypothetical*. This distinction is absolutely crucial. It enables us, in effect, to distinguish Schelling's transcendental idealism from Fichte's. For Fichte, the necessary must be found *in* the possible. In this way, he discovers the profoundly original figure of 'categorical hypotheticity' characterized by the 'Soll' in the *Science of Knowledge of 1804-II* and later in his doctrine of the image.<sup>6</sup> In the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, however, Schelling proposes a different reading of the connection between the categorical and the hypothetical (or, in his terms, between the necessary and the contingent). It is this interpretation by Schelling that I will now describe.

This original figure of transcendental philosophy contains two principal moments, which respectively implement the original concepts of reflection and production. The first is obtained from a confrontation between what Schelling calls 'philosophy of nature' and 'transcendental philosophy' by considering, in particular, the attempts by 'nature' to reflect its objective productions. The second concerns transcendental philosophy properly stated or, more precisely, the attempts by the ego to reflect (in turn) on these productions (producing a return of a different sort). It thus appears that there is an important transcendental moment in the philosophy of nature itself, what I call the 'transcendentalization of nature.' When nature, by being 'raised to a higher power' in different ways, is raised to self-consciousness, it begins a second series of produc-

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<sup>6</sup>On this point, see my work *Réflexion et spéculation. L'idéalisme transcendantal chez Fichte et Schelling* (Grenoble: J. Millon, 2009).

tions (which may be called the series of ‘transcendental naturalization’): the self-objectifications of the ego.<sup>7</sup> But, as we shall see, inasmuch as the position outlined in the *System* of 1800 still contains certain ambiguities (which I will consider later), we will have to turn to some passages in an important letter to Fichte from 19 November 1800 in which Schelling, *at the threshold of his system of identity (but before crossing this threshold)*, gives the clearest picture of his transcendental idealism.

### 3 The First Moment of Schelling’s Transcendental Idealism

First, let us consider the *first* moment of Schelling’s transcendental idealism. What makes knowledge possible, that is, the *reciprocal* meeting of subject (consciousness) and object (the unconscious)? In real knowledge, subject and object are united and identical. To philosophize is, more precisely, to explain what makes this knowledge possible. To do so, we must first perform an abstraction, which consists in separating and isolating the one from the other (the subject from the object). For Schelling, the rupture of this identity cannot take place for the benefit of one of two terms: The philosopher will have to explain knowledge as much from the subject as the object. Explaining the possibility of the connection between subject and object therefore demands (and allows) rising completely above the object—and also the subject. But since we have nothing other than these two terms, we start off first from one *or* from the other.

There are therefore only two possibilities given to the philosopher to explain knowledge. These two possibilities were indicated first by Fichte in Sect. 3 of the First Introduction to the *Science of Knowledge*.<sup>8</sup> Either

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<sup>7</sup>Note that these two series are not strictly symmetrical with respect to each other (as argued, for example, by Ernst Cassirer), but the second is the raising to a high power of the first, which means it is first raised to a higher degree of reflection. These two series do not relate to each other as do, for example, the two attributes of Spinoza’s substance.

<sup>8</sup>J.G. Fichte, ‘First Introduction to the Science of Knowledge,’ in *Science of Knowledge*, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge University Press: 1982), 8–9; *J.G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* [hereinafter cited as *GA*], division I, volume 4, ed. Erich Fuchs, Reinhard Lauth, and Hans Gliwitsky (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1964–2012), 188–189.

one starts from the object, from nature, to then ask how the subject reaches it and coincides with it—and then we practice what Schelling calls the ‘philosophy of nature’ (which is in complete opposition to Fichte, who attributed this approach to dogmatism)—or one starts from the subject, from the ego, to ‘get’ to nature from there—which will correspond to the approach found in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*. In the Introduction to this book from 1800, Schelling details the first point of view, that of the philosophy of nature, which is carried out elsewhere—in his *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (*Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*) (1797), in *Von der Weltseele, eine Hypothese der Physik der höheren Erklärung zur allgemeinen Organismus* (*On the World-soul: A Hypothesis of Higher Physics on the Explanation of the Universal Organism*) (1798), *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* (*First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*) (1799) and in his *Einleitung zu dem Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* (*Introduction to the Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*) (1799) as well as in some contributions to the *Zeitschrift für Physik spekulative* (*Journal of Speculative Physics*) (1800/1801), of which Schelling himself was the editor. Why is this privilege granted to the first point of view? Precisely because the philosophy of nature also has—contrary to appearances—a fundamental connection to transcendental philosophy.

We see, then, that Schelling characterizes the first point of view as consisting in starting from the object. However, Schelling is not satisfied with a mere descriptive analysis. On the contrary, he proposes to deduce the very concept of a philosophy of nature. The major difficulty with this deduction concerns the term ‘to annex [*hinzukommen*]<sup>9</sup>: how should we conceive of the way the subject will ‘adjoin’ itself to the object in order to enter into a ‘union’—into a connection of ‘adequation,’ into an ‘identity’—with it? The issue is that Schelling’s philosophy of nature is a *radicalization* and a serious undertaking of the ultimate consequences of Kant’s theory of the understanding, that is, that ‘we can know a priori of things only what we ourselves put into them’ (*CRP*, B XVIII)—which is the same principle, so to speak, as Kant’s transcendental philosophy

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<sup>9</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *ST*], trans. P. Heath (University Press Virginia, 1978), 5; *SW*, I/3, 340.

of knowledge.<sup>10</sup> This means, as I have just mentioned, that clarifying the inaugural act of Schelling's philosophy of nature requires us to pass through an understanding of transcendental philosophy. In virtue of a circularity that we stigmatize in general as having a vicious character, the philosophy of nature—even if it is necessary to abstract it (for methodological reasons) from transcendental philosophy—fundamentally refers to the latter. To develop this point, I shall now give a quick reminder of certain things Schelling has already dealt with elsewhere.<sup>11</sup>

For Schelling (which also means: for Schelling as he reads Fichte), it is crucial to first determine that the ego is an absolute activity. Any determination of the ego presupposes a *self*-determination of that same ego. Consequently, as Schelling emphasizes, that which determines the ego is its own product. But how is this conceivable? Before we can distinguish between the ego (mind) and the non-ego (nature), we must first understand the essence or active nature of the ego. The ego is self-determining and posits an activity in itself. On the other hand, the ego, as it determines itself to be determined, posits an activity outside of itself. The latter must be raised (by it) as acting (*einwirkend*) on itself. We can then distinguish between two series in the understanding: an ideal series and a real series. The ideal series concerns only the ego—'active' and 'determinate.' The real series is active (*wirkend*)—but not in the sense where the ego would act, but rather in the sense where the series acts on the ego—while proceeding from the activity of the (absolute) ego. The difficulty (but at the same time the solution) lies here. Schelling plays on the double meaning of '*wirkend*' in a certain way: at the same time as that which is acting and as that which is acted on. But it does not act here as a verbal slip because *activity-action* (that which the ego posits as acting on it from outside) is *only acting (wirkt) (on it) insofar as the ego determines it as active*.

<sup>10</sup> Note that this is a radicalization, which in no way entails that, in reality, Schelling thereby leaves the field of what could still be called the transcendental in a Kantian sense.

<sup>11</sup> See in particular, *Abhandlungen zur Erläuterung des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre (Essays in Explanation of the Idealism of the Science of Knowledge)* (1796/1797). In the interpretation that follows, I will build on Steffens' review of Schelling's writings. See 'Recension der neuern naturphilosophischen Schriften des Herausgebers,' in *Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik (Journal of Speculative Physics)*, vol. 1, book 1, ed. Manfred Durner (Hamburg: Meiner, 2001), 1–48.

As such, up to now we can still reconcile Schelling's point of view with Fichte's. However, Schelling will draw a major consequence from what has been established that will definitively alienate him from his mentor. He formulates it thus: *The real series (= the acting series) is an expression of the ideal series (= the determinate series)*. In this way, Schelling can reinterpret the identity of the two series. Consequently, what we see is connected with the passage just quoted from the second Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*: The real series 'expressing' the ideal series is, in effect, another manner of saying simply—not from the point of view of the 'subject' but from the 'object'—that we know *a priori* the things that we *ourselves put there*, except that the 'we' must be understood as the absolute ego. (This does not relieve us of the need to explain how Schelling can both give *autonomy* to the productive force of nature and affirm this identity between the two series. For more on this, see below.)

That is how Schelling can thus explain the way the subject 'adjoins' to the object that does not contain it, but excludes it. The other problem is, of course, the representability of the object (or nature). Schelling's objective, remember, is to explain the possibility of *knowledge* (*Wissen*). For him, such an explanation must account at the same time for the *Wissen* proper to the *Wissenschaften* (the sciences), leaving the possibility of a fundamental reform of the latter. However, the science that is proper to nature is *Naturwissenschaft* (natural science). The first point of view thus consists in realizing the principle of knowledge of natural science, that is, in finding a (or rather, 'the') *philosophy of nature*. What does this tendency to ensure that the object reaches the subject, the nature of intelligence, mean given our previous claims? It consists exactly in accounting for the *expression* of the ideal series in the real series, in putting the *a priori* into things, or, Schelling himself puts it, 'to bring *theory* into the phenomena of nature [*Theorie in die Naturerscheinungen bringen*]' (*ST*, 6; *SW*, I/3 340). In Schelling's interpretation of transcendental idealism, what I attend to here is the development of what I call 'the transcendentalization of nature' (knowing that this 'transcendentalization' does not deny nor leave open the transcendental perspective first given by Kant—and this is precisely because Schelling insists in an original way, on the identity

of the real series and the ideal series).<sup>12</sup> Why is it a 'transcendentalization of nature' and not a 'naturalization of the transcendental'? Precisely because Schelling intends to supplement transcendental philosophy with what appears as its objective side. Transcendental philosophy not only explains how, from the point of view of the subject (or in starting from it), *a priori* knowledge of objects is possible, but also, conversely, starting from the object, it establishes at the same time how objectivity 'reflects' and 'expresses' what was first identified and established by 'transcendental logic.' For Schelling, transcendental philosophy involves not only the 'formation' of the object by the subject (by the *a priori* forms of the subject), but also, and conversely, the representable representation, the theorization of nature, and the subjectification of the object. The philosophy of nature will thus establish the manner in which nature comes to its intelligibility and how the unconscious becomes conscious. In this way, we can actually identify here a new figure of transcendentalism before entering Schelling's system of transcendental idealism itself.

The originality of Schelling's philosophy of nature resides in highlighting the 'tendency [*Tendenz*]' (he also speaks of an 'urge [*Bestreben*]') of natural science 'to render nature intelligent' (*ST*, 6; *SW*, I/3, 341). Schelling discovers in this science of nature a teleological process of 'spiritualizing [*Vergeistigung*]' of all the laws of nature meant, ultimately, to open onto the laws of intuition and pure thought. This is a process of 'dematerialization' resulting in pure forms (which come from simple laws).<sup>13</sup>

How can we characterize this tendency toward the becoming-intelligent of nature more precisely? The crucial term here is that of 'reflection.' *Schelling places reflection already within nature*—and this is another determination of Schelling's sense of 'transcendental' (as 'nature transcendentalized'). Nature is self-reflective, reflection that is deposited in its 'products.' This means that, in itself, nature is already intelligence,

<sup>12</sup> And this figure is a direct response to the First Introduction of Fichte's *Science of Knowledge* where he claimed—at the beginning of Sect. 6—that 'dogmatism is completely unable to explain what it must' ('First Introduction,' 16; *GA*, I/4: 195).

<sup>13</sup> Schelling evokes this by way of the series: optical phenomena (where the only 'substance' is the light), magnetic phenomena (which are completely immaterial), and gravitational phenomena (thus indicating the action of a single law).



but without having consciousness. The ‘still life,’ in particular, is such a product, but just dead and unconscious. The series (ascending) of the various ‘deposits’ in which the intelligent character of nature is reflected more and more clearly is none other than this process of ‘dematerialization’ discussed presently. The *telos* of this process, the supreme and ultimate reflection, is reason and humanity. This is where the identity as well as nature of intelligence is realized and becomes conscious of itself.

## 4 The Second Moment of Schelling’s Transcendental Idealism

We come now to the second moment of Schelling’s transcendental idealism. I will discuss it in three stages: (1) by describing its ‘fundamental convictions,’ (2) by comparing the mathematical method to that of transcendental philosophy, and (3) by precisely elaborating the self-objectification of the ego as an essential characteristic of this transcendental idealism.

Transcendental philosophy has knowledge as its object. *What* is knowledge knowledge of? Fichte answered the question thus: This knowledge is knowledge of ‘facts,’ of ‘acts of consciousness,’ whose ‘geneticization’ legitimizes all knowledge as knowledge (that is, it makes knowledge ‘pure,’ ‘non-objective,’ and ‘in-itself’). The *Wissenschaftslehre* is a transcendental philosophy because it exhibits the conditions of the self-generation of *Einsicht* (insight). To identify these ‘facts,’ Schelling uses another term for them: that of the ‘*Grundüberzeugung* (fundamental conviction)’ of natural consciousness. All knowledge expresses such ‘beliefs,’ and it is the task of transcendental philosophy to reduce them to only one—which is simply the ‘first principle’ of transcendental philosophy—that precedes them and from which all others can be derived. In this principle resides the first and absolute certainty that is rooted in transcendental idealism. Schelling enumerates several fundamental beliefs of all knowledge that will constitute this level of transcendental philosophy.

1. The first conviction—which is the same one, par excellence, of theoretical knowledge—concerns the identity of being and appearance. Things are not different from how we represent them to ourselves; there

is not, behind what is given to us, a world beyond that is distinct from it. Things are established immutably, and it is this determination to which our representations of the same things respond. In other words, the necessity, or the regularity, of the things in the world is such that we are always able to think of them. But how does this justify thinking? How can our representations correspond to objects that are qualitatively quite different from them? This is the first task to resolve—which is not so different, in fact, from the theoretical knowledge that deals with the condition of possibility of all experience.

2. The second conviction—that of practical philosophy—is that we can ‘intervene’ in reality, that is to say, we can ensure that what is primarily a (‘subjective’) representation obtains objective validity. This assumes that objectivity is modifiable and capable of conforming to what was initially ‘freely’ represented. The second task before us, then, is to explain how our representations, our thoughts, can influence reality. This is effectively practical philosophy since it is precisely the condition of our free acts.
3. I note here that a contradiction lies in the opposition between what is determining and that which determines or between what is modifiable and that which is not. In the first case, objects are determined and our representations conform to them. In the second case, objects are modified through determining representations. While, for Kant, this opposition stood on two completely different planes—on the theoretical plane that is only relevant to a transcendental approach on one side and that of practical reason on the other—to Schelling (again following Fichte), this acts as an opposition within the framework of transcendental philosophy. This is something well known but deserves to be highlighted. The precise problem here is, in fact, the fundamental conviction—the reality of external things—and, more particularly, the first presupposition just pointed to: if things are already determined in their being, we do not see how we could intervene in them, and if such an action were possible, then the things would lose their reality ‘in themselves.’ Hence, the third task of transcendental philosophy is the supreme task: how are all of our representations to direct themselves in accordance with objects, and how are these objects to direct themselves according to our representations? The solution should be sought in neither theoretical nor practical philosophy, but

in a philosophy 'which is the link that that combines them both, and neither theoretical nor practical, but *both* at once' (*ST*, 11; *SW*, I/3 348). What is this philosophy? What characterizes it first and in its own right?

In other words, transcendental philosophy is first divided into two 'parts': the one that reflects our experience and one that reflects our freedom to act. These parts can be understood by their 'identity' such that if we rise to *another* level, the contradiction evoked can be removed. This other level is characterized by its *universality* and its radical difference from any *particular* or *individual* consciousness (as expressed already at the level of theoretical philosophy, as well as at the practical level, where it acts as *my* experience and *my* freedom, even if we consider them in their abstract generality). In the *Darstellung* of 1801, Schelling will call this universal level 'reason.' One may have thought that it is only here that he would complete his philosophical rupture from any heritage of consciousness still present in his thinking (that is, from Fichte), but this universal level already finds a matured expression in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*.

But how can Schelling connect these two levels—universal and particular—without the one being only a pure abstraction and the other a single hypostasis? The terms that are decisive here are those of 'activity' on the one hand and 'conscious' and 'unconscious' on the other. Schelling explains this identity, putting it first in a summary way, as an activity that is productive consciously in free action and unconsciously in the production of the world. This activity is not that of a concrete ego, nor that of a finite ego, and it is the consciousness of this activity that concludes it, because it appears to emanate from, or at least belong to, an ego now conscious of itself. Therefore, the unconscious character of this activity does not represent a privation. It is rather consciousness that is secondary to the absolute ego (that is to say, reason).

Schelling clearly affirms that only a *superior* philosophy can solve the problem of the identity between two distinct worlds: the ideal world and the real world, the world as it is modified by our representations and the objective world that regulates these same representations. This superior philosophy has for its subject matter the absolute ego (reason), which

is activity—productive activity. The following, then, is the relationship between the absolute ego and the finite ego in practical and theoretical philosophy. The free will of the finite ego is an *externalization* of the productive activity of the absolute ego—*conscious* externalization. But in the theoretical attitude of the knowing ego, this productive activity is equally at work—however, in an *unconscious* register. The ideal world and the real world are thus ‘in harmony.’ This harmony is only conceivable provided that we see that there is indeed here one and the same productive activity and that the alleged difference between the ideal world and the real world depends on the various ways in which the finite ego ‘becomes conscious’ of this activity.

Here, we reach a new dualism that is no longer the dualism between theory and practice, nor between nature and intelligence, but between *productive activity* and the *products* of this activity. But, I insist, this does not mean that Schelling will renew, through this new distinction, the opposition between practice and theory. This distinction is rather, it seems to me, between the infinite and the finite, or between the absolute and relative—and we know that *the* question of philosophy for Schelling has always been exactly this ever since *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795), in which Schelling, who had just turned 20, poses the question: ‘how can I come out of the absolute and go to its opposite?’ This itself is just another way, however, according to Schelling’s interpretation already set forth in *Vom Ich (Of the I)* (1795), of knowing how a judgment can be synthetic *a priori*. It is this question that dominates the *System* of 1800 where Schelling proposes an understanding of transcendental philosophy that it is supposed to answer this problem.

However, this consideration of nature (and of its products) according to this double mode of consciousness had already found expression in Kant’s critical philosophy (the debt to the *Critique of Judgment* is obvious here)—that is, in *teleology* or in philosophy of natural ends. Schelling states explicitly that the products of nature are arranged according to *ends* without being accordingly *explainable* as these same ends (*‘nature is purposive, without being purposively explicable [zweckmässiges, ohne zu Zweckmässiges erklärbar sein]’* [ST, 12; SW, I/3, 349])—which again is another way of saying that there is (in the will) the expression of a productive activity without it being conscious in the theoretical attitude. The

superior philosophy sought will focus first and foremost on the teleology that unifies theoretical and practical philosophy.<sup>14</sup>

To capture Schelling's transcendental idealism in an even more precise way, we should compare the approach of the mathematician with the transcendental philosopher. In this regard, the last paragraph of the Introduction to the *System* contains valuable methodological indications concerning the 'organ of transcendental philosophy' and, in particular, the notions of 'intuition' and 'construction.' Transcendental philosophy—but perhaps we should say instead 'philosophy in general'—has only one object. Schelling designates it as 'subjective.' This is the (only) immediate object of transcendental philosophy. It follows that it is the object of an intuition (intuition being, as we know, the representation specific to sensibility, under which an object is given to us immediately), which implies it is given to us before it is deployed in a discursive manner. But how are we to understand, in more exact terms, this mode of immediate givenness? The answer is given to us if we compare how the transcendental philosopher and the mathematician proceed in their work.

For Schelling (following Kant), the mathematician proceeds by construction. 'Construction' means '*seeing* a (discursive) argument *in* the forms of intuition.' This '*seeing in*' is unique in that the ('subjective') understanding is nothing but the unveiling of a property in the form of intuition (that is, something 'objective', something of which we are not the source, just as it is not we who engender the properties of a triangle). In other words—and it is thus that we usually conceive construction—in construction we see the universal in the particular. The unity is here, in terms of the *a priori*, the very same that is characteristic of sensation in terms of the *a posteriori*, as, for example, in the taste of something. It is *me* who tastes, but I always taste *something*. A sensation expresses the irreducible unity of something both 'subjective' and 'objective.' And it is the same in mathematical construction. Unlike an approach that proceeds by mere concepts (which characterizes, for Kant, the philosophical method), where the second term of the unity is lacking (and where

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<sup>14</sup> Note that this philosophy of natural ends is the very point of unification for theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy—thus, it is not merely unconscious.

there is no intuition that would find itself united with the discursive approach), mathematical construction is also characterized by the unity of something 'subjective' and 'objective.' However, for Schelling, the legitimation of the discourse of the transcendental philosopher requires reconsidering the relationship between the conduct of the mathematician and philosopher.<sup>15</sup>

Schelling first states what distinguishes these two modes of conduct in *negative* ways. For mathematics just as for philosophy (this should be emphasized, because in the *Darstellung* it is no longer the case), its object is by no means present *outside of knowledge* (*ST*, 13; *SW*, I/3, 350). There are many objects in intuition. The first difference is that for mathematics, this intuition is *external* while for philosophy it is *internal*. But this is not the fundamental difference. More importantly, the attitude of the mathematician is that of the realist. It is that the mathematician only deals with the *result* of their construction (the 'construct'), while the philosopher considers the *act of construction* itself.

By deepening this point, we can understand how the philosophical approach distinguishes itself *positively* from that of the mathematician. 'Construction' has a very specific meaning in (transcendental) philosophy. For even if the philosopher 'looks to [*sieht auf*]' the act of construction—and not so, to speak, its 'result'—this intuiting is *in turn a constructing*: '[T]he whole object of this philosophy is nothing else but the action of the intellect according to determinate laws' (*ST*, 13; *SW*, I/3, 350) and, at the same time, 'the objects of the transcendental philosopher exist not at all, save insofar as they are freely produced' (*ST*, 13; *SW*, I/3, 350). There is a circular relationship (not vicious!) between the productive acts of constructing and intuiting: '[t]his action can be grasped only through immediate inner intuition on one's own part, and this too is possible only through a production' (*ST*, 13; *SW*, I/3, 350).

The question we need to answer is to know how, in transcendental philosophy, the 'subjective' can become 'object(ive)'—because, in itself, meaning outside of this 'artificial' attitude, this objectification does

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<sup>15</sup> On Schelling's concept of 'transcendental construction,' see the doctoral thesis of Jürgen Weber, *Begriff und Konstruktion. Rezeptionsanalytische Untersuchungen zu Kant und Schelling* (Göttingen: Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen, 1998).

not occur. The subjective, we have seen, is *unconscious*. Its becoming-conscious is achieved in two ways that each time brings into play a different sense of *reflection*. The unconscious is reflected *through* or *by means of products*—or, more appropriately, they reflect it. Or—another possibility—the unconscious is reflected *in intellectual intuition*—and it is then a true *reflexive* return. In the first case, this ‘reflection’ is *external*; in the second case, it is *internal*. The reflection of the unconscious, thanks to the particular products, concerns art (being reflected in the unconscious is thought of as *an aesthetic act of the imagination*). Its reflection in intellectual intuition, however, concerns *philosophy* properly stated. Schelling, by drawing the consequences of the preceding, was concerned with the status of the external world, the reality of which is, *for common sense*, merely *presupposed*. For the transcendental philosopher, there is no real world. At most, there is an ideal world, which means we must adopt the aesthetic attitude (and thus do philosophy of art). Thus, there are no means for the philosopher to demonstrate the existence of the external world (this is impossible), but only to demonstrate what is the basis of this appearance. Compared to common sense, the philosopher’s task consists, then, in ‘lay[ing] bare the inevitability of its delusions’ (*ST*, 14; *SW*, I/3, 352).

To summarize Schelling’s intention, we could say this: Whereas the philosophy of nature ‘spiritualizes’ the laws of nature (by making them laws of the intellect), transcendental philosophy embodies the laws of the intellect. And the essential point is to show that what has reality only subjectively (in our intuiting) *must necessarily be reflected as being there outside of us*. Why ‘necessarily’? Because ‘the objective world belongs only to the necessary limitations which makes self-consciousness (the I am) possible’ (*ST*, 14; *SW*, I/3, 352). The circle closes itself—and this is what we must see: While we have seen all along that the philosophy of nature needed the principle of transcendental philosophy, it now appears that transcendental philosophy needs the principle of the philosophy of nature. Schelling’s transcendental philosophy thus effectively achieves an absolutely radical circularity (no one before him had been driven to this extreme) between the subjective and objective (as well as between that which is the principle of both).

This clarification of the method of the transcendental philosopher compared to the mathematician being completed, I can now identify in

more exact terms the figure of Schelling's own transcendental idealism. Recall once again that it is characterized by two levels: first, by a 'transcendentalization of nature' (as in the work on *Naturphilosophie*) that points out the process of the different attempts of self-reflection by nature (a process through which the ideal series of the ego is expressed in the real series); second, by a self-objectification of the ego (by a kind of 'naturalization' or, better, of 'objectification' by the transcendental), where, once this process has reached its highest 'power' (*Potenz*) (= the act of self-consciousness, see below), self-objectification will give rise to productions of a new kind (which are the work of transcendental philosophy).

The search for the 'premises' of Kant's transcendental philosophy sits at the second level—for Schelling, it returns to the question of knowing how, concretely, the transcendental ego can be conscious of itself. Thus, in this apprehending of self by the ego, the self-objectification of the latter is not instantaneous; it does not take place in a single action, but in a plurality of actions that constitute the 'transcendental history of the ego.' Transcendental philosophy is the philosophy that establishes the manner in which, *by the way the ego becomes its own object*, the transcendental ego is aware of itself. And what is decisive here, I insist, is that Schelling reinterprets, in his own understanding of transcendental philosophy, the necessary/possible connection (which I have already established above as the important thing for the most developed understanding of the transcendental) in terms of the conscious/unconscious distinction. What justifies this shift in terminology? Schelling does not see (contrary to Fichte), I have already mentioned, the necessary *in* the possible (the essential characteristic of Fichte's reflection), but rather transcendental philosophy consists, in his view, in an assumption that makes it necessary to look for *conditions*. If these conditions are *really* 'in' consciousness, then the hypothesis is verified. Consequently, for him, the accession to the necessary results in the passage from the unconscious to consciousness. In a key passage of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*,<sup>16</sup> Schelling specifies that the understanding of *necessity* depends on the degree of consciousness (and what appears as contingent only appears as such because the ego does not exactly have

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<sup>16</sup>Namely, at the beginning of solution II of the second period (in which Schelling gives the clearest indications of his transcendental idealism).



consciousness) (*ST*, 100; *SW*, I/3, 462–463), an indication that is without doubt *the* key to Schelling's transcendental idealism. According to the latter, the unconscious and the conscious are distributed between the 'natural' ego and 'transcendental' ego, a tension that will eventually be overcome as a result of the so-called transcendental history of ego.<sup>17</sup>

We understand from this the meaning of Schelling's definition of transcendental philosophy: In the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling defines this transcendental philosophy as a '*Potenzieren* (potentiation)' phase of the ego, a process that brings about this latter point of view of the philosopher (*ST*, 90; *SW*, I/3, 450). Each power within this progression permitted the understanding of what, respectively, could make possible the inferior power. Hence, the specific method of transcendental philosophy: It proceeds at the level of each power of self-intuition of the ego and consists then in leading the ego—through which it will appear precisely as its own object—from *one* level (or one power) of this self-intuition to the *higher* level (or power) each time. The ultimate level (or power) is that one in which the ego will finally be composed of *all* the determinations that have already been contained in the *free* and *conscious* act of self-consciousness (an act that characterizes precisely the point of view of the philosopher). To do this, Schelling adopts in each case (that is to say, every time it comes to improving the process of potentiation) *first* the point of view of the philosopher before showing how the ego manages *in turn* what the philosopher has understood. The 'transcendental history of the ego' corresponds to a journey through the 'epochs (*Epochen*)' of the self-objectification of the ego, meaning it traces the route of the ego through which it comes to the transcendental knowledge thanks to the way, gradually, it becomes its own object.

This type of transcendental philosophy (in its difference from Fichte's) also implies a different understanding of the status and role of 'reality': for Fichte, reality is—negatively—a *deposit* of the activity of reflection and—positively—a *reflection of reflection*, whereas for Schelling, this reality is to be sought *in* consciousness, *in* the epochs constituting the transcendental history of the ego. This difference is crucial. The perspective (that of

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<sup>17</sup> This reconsideration of the categorical/hypothetical pair through this other conscious/unconscious pair is indeed essential and dominates the entire *System of Transcendental Idealism*. But the categorical/hypothetical pair is also involved in a specific place in the work: at the interface between the system of theoretical philosophy and the system of practical philosophy.

Schelling) of a reality *within* reflection is irreducible to one (that of Fichte) of a reflection beyond (or below) all reality. For Schelling, it is a matter of knowing what gives *reality* to the determinations of knowledge. And he responds to this precisely with the construction of a double ego: the philosophical ego ('we') and the finite ego (or 'ego' for short). It is the latter that *produces* the determinations of knowledge, which, I insist, are certainly already posed with and in the act of self-consciousness.

## 5 The 'Objective Subject-Object'

Despite these breakthroughs, the *System of Transcendental Idealism* has not yet managed to resolve all its ambiguities—in particular that concerning the status of self-consciousness and the relationship between the 'philosophical' ego and the 'finite' ego that produces the moments of knowledge that enable it to self-objectify. The position attained by Schelling immediately after the release of the *System* of 1800 and at the threshold of the 'system of identity' of 1801—a position that is expressed in a letter to Fichte from 19 November 1800<sup>18</sup>—can clarify these points.

Schelling explains his new point of departure (which is not at all irreconcilable, I believe, with that of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*) in this letter. The absolute, the supreme principle, is the absolute identity of subject and object. Now, *two* points of view are possible on this 'subject-object': it can be considered either as an 'objective subject-object' or as a 'subjective subject-object.' (*This double point of view does not betray the fundamental idea of transcendentalism as a correlation between a subjective dimension and an objective dimension in any obvious fashion.*) These are in a double relation of abstraction—the one with regard to the other. Self-consciousness designates, for Fichte as well as for Schelling, the identity of subject and object, an identity that, in its acting (in its self-posing), intuits itself as such. In his letter from 19 November 1800, Schelling envisages from then on the possibility of being able *to abstract* the intuit-

<sup>18</sup> J.G. Fichte and F.W.J. Schelling, *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence (1800–1802)* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 43 ff.; *Schelling—Fichte Briefwechsel. Kommentiert und herausgegeben von Hartmut Traub*, ed. Hartmut Traub (Neuried: Ars Una, 2001), 178 ff.

ing activity—which explains how it is possible that the absolute ego can become conscious of itself *without falling into the split of the subject and the object characterizing finite consciousness*; this explains, in other words, simply how it is necessary to conceive the status of self-consciousness. And it is by this abstraction that we obtain the objective subject-object. The subjective subject-object is none other than the absolute ego of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, while the objective subject-object is the ultimate principle of philosophy (forming the heart of the ‘material proof’ for this). The objective subject-object is therefore obtained by abstracting the intuiting activity that characterizes self-consciousness. The subjective subject-object is an abstraction of another kind vis-à-vis the objective subject-object: It exists in the ‘higher power (*Potenz*)’, which means that the subjective subject-object *presupposes* the objective subject-object, but cannot become conscious of a higher degree of reflection (and which does not contradict the fact, of course, that the real series is an expression of ideal series [see below]).

Why does the *System* of 1800 nevertheless still begin with the absolute act of self-consciousness (that is, by the subjective subject-object *with* its intuiting activity)? Because it is the concrete and lively demonstration of the identity of subject and object (while the act of starting directly from the absolute position of the objective subject-object would return to a dogmatic act).

We can finally better understand the status of the ‘philosophical’ ego and ‘finite’ ego. The ego that produces the real content of knowledge is the objective subject-object; self-consciousness, the philosopher’s point of view, is the subjective subject-object. The second is only the *ratio cognoscendi* of the first, while the first is the *ratio essendi* of the second. The objective subject-object is instituted thus: as a supreme expression of the unity of the transcendental point of view of the philosophy of nature with that of transcendental philosophy itself.

## 6 Conclusion: The Achievement and Failure of Schelling’s Transcendental Idealism

Now for some concluding remarks. While Fichte’s transcendentalism interprets the search for the conditions of the *possibility of a priori* (= necessary and universal) knowledge as highlighting a categorical hypotheticity, Schelling conceives this relationship between the hypothetical and the

categorical as the attempt of the principle (= absolute ego or transcendental ego) to apprehend itself (and thus know itself as self-legitimizing). The fundamental difference between the two idealisms crystallizes in Schelling's reproach to Fichte that his Science of Knowledge is *purely formal*. Schelling proposes a solution for avoiding this pitfall in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*. This implements a very different conception of reality. For Schelling, the *content* of knowledge is an integral part of the apprehension of the ego itself. The transcendental here intervenes on *two levels*: at the level of the series of attempts toward self-reflection by nature, as in *Naturphilosophie*, and at the level of the series of self-objectifications of the ego, as in *Transzendentalphilosophie* properly stated. Every moment of the first series has its corresponding moment in the second and vice versa. The 'pivot' is the act of self-consciousness, which serves as the arrival point of *Naturphilosophie* (the supreme 'power') and point of departure for *Transzendentalphilosophie*. The supreme power of the latter contains *all* the determinations that have already been included in the *free* and *conscious* act of self-consciousness. All this implements two kinds of production, two kinds of reflection, and also two kinds of egos (in his later language, two kinds of subject-object). In the first series of reflections, the one specific to the philosophy of nature, the ego *unconsciously* produces moments of self-objectification, which then appear to the ego as realities *independent* of it. The whole process here consists in raising the unconscious ego to the conscious ego—to 'theorize' nature, to 'subjectify' the object. In the second series, which is specific to transcendental philosophy, the ego takes the opposite direction. It produces the moments in which it self-objectifies. This entails two 'egos': a 'natural' ego (= objective subject-object) that operates these productions and a 'philosophizing' ego (= subjective subject-object) that understands this process. It is here that the categorical (necessary) and hypothetical (contingent) are distributed: for one (natural consciousness) is seen as contingent and the other (philosophizing consciousness) as necessary. The process ends when the two 'egos' merge, when all contingency is exhausted in the necessary, when unconscious productions are brought to transparent consciousness.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Finally, note that time intervenes here as decisive: it is the 'moment' where self-consciousness (thus, the 'pivot' of the two series) blossoms and where it articulates thinking and reality. Hence, it clarifies why the distribution between the hypothetical and the categorical comes about under different 'epochs': it is expressed here by the specific temporality of the 'speculative.' The epochs are

With his idea of a ‘self-objectification’ of the categories and determinations of the ‘subject,’ Schelling adds an ‘objective’ supplement of immense significance to the subjective component emphasized in Fichte’s conception of transcendental idealism. We cannot underestimate the importance of such a move. We can only conceive of the transcendental as having a ‘realist’ scope if the legitimation of knowledge does not end with an ‘endogenous’ dimension (a dimension that is essential because the subjective legitimation of knowledge depends precisely upon it). It must also reveal an ‘endo-exogenous’ character. By the term ‘endo-exogeneity’ of what gives and presents itself—that is, of the ‘phenomenal field’ as such—I hope to capture a fundamental characteristic of transcendental philosophy for Schelling: namely, the fact any element of this field is not only subject to an ‘egological’ transcendental genesis (as it is, for Fichte, by being carried out purely by the ego), but also that this genesis must account for realities that are ‘apparently’ independent. The *System of Transcendental Idealism* thus aims to provide the content and tenor of such a kind of knowledge of the real respectful of the constraints of the transcendental perspective. That this position is, in turn, ultimately one-sided (concerns itself only with the absolute ego) explains why the Fichtean conception of transcendental philosophy cannot be so easily abandoned, even by a transcendental philosophy that explicitly tries to do so, for through transcendental philosophy the ego does, after all, aim to apprehend itself in its own activity (here referring in particular to the third type of knowledge named by Kant).

Although philosophies of the subject have fallen into disrepute today for precisely these kinds of worries—‘mind-independence’ always risks being merely ‘apparent,’ a moment through which the ego simply apprehends *itself* rather than its *Other*—it is doubtful that we can, or would want to, simply return to a dogmatic realism. What Schelling so vividly demonstrates, however, is that for any such philosophy that tries to take

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not simple ‘syntheses’ (as in Fichte’s *Grundlage* of 1794/95), but the expression of the inscription of the real (specifically temporalized) in the operations of the transcendental philosopher. This figure of the transcendental is unpublished, profoundly original and—although Schelling did not pursue it personally—the greatest interest in the history of transcendental philosophy. For more on the status of time in the transcendental idealisms of Schelling and Fichte, see my work *En deçà du sujet. Du temps dans la philosophie transcendental allemande* (Paris: PUF, 2010).

the demands of realism seriously, the danger of succumbing to a type of Fichteanism is always present. Are we able to avoid falling into such a pitfall? Are the critiques of correlationism, idealism, and so on, ultimately right? Elsewhere, I have argued that what we need today is a transcendently 'generative' approach to phenomena: We must re-establish a certain kind of transcendental philosophy as first philosophy, now rethought in phenomenological terms, but under the stipulation that the 'back (*zurück*)' in the 'back to the things themselves (*zurück zu den Sachen selbst*)!' be replaced with a 'go forth (*hervor*)' or a 'beyond towards (*hinaus*).'<sup>20</sup> Such a task requires a new conception of the determinations of the subject, one that can do justice to the Otherness of phenomena, yet without making them into an 'evental' intrusion upon consciousness as some recent phenomenologists have done, taking the other extreme. For such a 'generative' approach, the *System of Transcendental Idealism* is still of profound relevance in terms of its critique of Fichte's formalism. It provides, for the first time, concepts through which the idea of an independent reality can be taken seriously in the vocabulary of transcendental philosophy. (Kant's own, it must be recalled, is here inconsistent with its own basic commitments in that it relies too much on the thing in itself.) But its scope of is nonetheless limited by the fact that the parallelism of the two series does not reach the depths of an actual *transcendental genesis of an independent* reality, thus falling short of the realist challenge.

While it certainly does not go far enough, the Schellingian approach to transcendental philosophy exemplified in his 'first system'—a text underestimated in Anglo-Salon research in classical German philosophy—nonetheless makes valuable contributions to the current debate apropos 'new realisms' (Meillassoux, Descola, Chalmers, Gabriel, Harman, and so on), provided, however, that we view it in connection to Fichte. This is because it hints at the possibility of a 'generative' perspective that would enable us to oppose the critiques of 'correlationism' (whether it be of the Kantian, Fichtean, Schellingian, or in particular phenomenological type) by *intensifying, radicalizing*, the very transcendental approach itself,

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<sup>20</sup> For a more thorough development of these questions (in terms of what I call a 'transcendent reflexivity' and a 'speculative transcendentalism'), see Alexander Schnell, *La débissance du sens* (Paris: Hermann, 2015) and *Wirklichkeitsbilder* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck [forthcoming]).

an approach that argues that 'reality' is not *presupposed* as autonomous or independent, but is first secured, *as autonomous and independent*, by a genesis (I use the term 'generativity' to reflect the relationship to the *transcendent*, something Schelling's achievement philosophy resolutely emphasizes). In this way, not only Schelling's achievement—a truly independent moment vis-à-vis the ego—but also his failure—how his gesture is, in the end, similar to Fichte's insofar as it does not enough to develop a genuine transcendence *generated* immanently—outlines both the problem and task for any philosopher who seeks to give a satisfying answer to how a subject can reach the real in a non-dogmatic fashion.

# 4

## 'Animals, Those Incessant Somnambulists': A Critique of Schelling's Anthropocentrism

Devin Zane Shaw

The resurgence of interest in the thought of F.W.J. Schelling is due in part to his attempts to construct a system of nature-philosophy that could express the living and dynamic powers of nature. Before figures in the phenomenological tradition, such as Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty, turned their attention to the question of nature, Schelling had recognized that modern philosophy, from Descartes forward, lacked a true philosophy of nature. We could note, for example, that when Schelling argues in 'Concerning the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature' that common concepts of nature reduce it to an 'indefinite quantity of objects,' to a receptacle for these objects, or to a source of goods to be exploited for human use, his critique clearly anticipates Heidegger's critique of the ways that technicity reduces nature to standing reserve.<sup>1</sup> Recent scholarship

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<sup>1</sup>F.W.J. Schelling, 'Concerning the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature,' in *The True Voice of Feeling: Studies in English Romantic Poetry*, by Herbert Read (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 325; *SW*, I/7: 293. Citations of Schelling provide the pagination of the English translation followed by that of the *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, 14 vols, ed. Karl Friedrich

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has been attentive to the way that this type of framing wittingly or unwittingly transforms Schelling's historical antecedence into conceptual subordination—where Schelling remains an intermediary between Kant and a subsequent figure such as Hegel or Heidegger. Therefore, some contemporary exponents of Schellingian philosophy evaluate the philosophical tradition in light of Schelling's thought, although they do not necessarily agree in their assessments. For Jason Wirth, Schelling's philosophical accomplishment—and, given the breadth of Wirth's engagement with various other subjects, by extension the accomplishment of contemporary Schellingianism—rests on the ability to integrate natural science, art, history, and religion within a philosophy in which nature is 'the image of thinking as such' and nature-philosophy an 'infinite exercise of philosophizing and not this or that philosophy.'<sup>2</sup> By contrast, Iain Hamilton Grant situates Schelling's speculative physics in opposition to the post-Kantian and post-critical tradition that, beginning with the problem of the thing-in-itself, externalizes—or even eliminates—nature, resulting in a two-world metaphysics that separates nature and thought. This separation, Grant avers, informs 'most phenomenological and all ethico-political philosophy, alongside the linguistic idealism that represents "nature" as determined solely in and for language.'<sup>3</sup> The two-world metaphysics of post-Kantian philosophy, he argues, forestalls any attempt to naturalize speculative philosophy.

It is not my intention here to evaluate the differing approaches of Wirth and Grant. Instead, I want to note how Schellingian philosophy, despite the differences between its proponents, has emerged as a standpoint by which to evaluate and critique contemporary philosophical problems. But this means, as nature-philosophy gains currency within these discussions—for example, Grant's Schellingian speculative physics became an important intervention in the debates concerning the meaning and project

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August Schelling (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J. G. Cotta, 1856–61). References to the K.F.A. Schelling edition are given by the abbreviation *SW*, division, volume and page number.

<sup>2</sup> Jason M. Wirth, 'Nature of Imagination: At the Heart of Schelling's Thinking,' in *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism*, ed. Matthew C. Altman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 457–458.

<sup>3</sup> Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling* (New York, Continuum, 2008), 15.

of speculative realism<sup>4</sup>—that we ought to address problems endemic to Schelling's elaboration of nature-philosophy. One such endemic problem concerns the status—more specifically, I will contend, the *moral* status—of animals in Schelling's thought.

Given his critique of both Kant's formalist account of practical reason and the lack of a concept of living nature in modern philosophy, Schelling's work seems like it could be a fertile starting point for reassessing the relationship between human animals and non-human animals.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the predominant standpoint of the philosophical tradition—from Aristotle through the modern philosophers criticized by Schelling—is one that privileges anthropocentrism.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, while predominant accounts of animal rights highlight how individual human choices can refuse or resist taking part in economies of intensive factory farming or vivisection, the liberal ideal of individual freedom is, as Gary Steiner notes, 'ill-suited to protect the moral status of animals.'<sup>7</sup> Take, for example, Peter Singer, who attempts to counter speciesism by insisting on providing 'equal consideration' to all beings who suffer. The utilitarian approach to giving equal consideration to the interests of sentient beings (sentience being shorthand for the capacity for pleasure or pain), though, considers these beings as if they are '*mere receptacles*' for 'quanta of pleasure and pain.'<sup>8</sup> The flaw, on Steiner's account, is that utilitarianism gives

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<sup>4</sup> See Peter Gratton, *Speculative Realism: Problems and Prospects* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), especially chapter 6.

<sup>5</sup> From this point forward I will, as a form of admittedly pernicious shorthand, refer to human animals as *humans* or *human beings* and all other non-human animals as *animals*.

<sup>6</sup> Here I refer the reader to Gary Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005). Note that, for Steiner, there is more ambiguity in Aristotle's account of the relation between humans and animals than I can discuss here. He argues (77–78) that with the Stoics, 'for the first time in the history of Western philosophy, human rationality is seized upon as the basis for a categorical claim to the moral superiority of human beings over animals [...]. Although Aristotle comes close in the ethical and psychological texts to embracing such a position, the Stoics are the first to offer a systematic argument for the proposition that human beings owe no obligations whatsoever to animals.'

<sup>7</sup> Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> The phrase and emphasis of '*mere receptacles*' is from Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, updated edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 208; the latter quotation is from Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents*, 9. (See also Steiner's critique of Regan's deontological position, 9–13).

precedence to humans over animals insofar as they are receptacles that can contain greater quanta of pleasure or pain. Hence ‘the principle of equal consideration functions much as Marx says the liberal principle of legal equality does: by treating unequal beings as if they were equal, the principle of equal consideration of interests preserves underlying de facto inequalities.’<sup>9</sup> In light of these problems, Schelling’s nature-philosophy could offer an alternative to these prevalent accounts of the moral status of animals.

In this essay, I will test the principles of Schelling’s nature-philosophy against the conclusions he draws concerning the status of animals. His claim that, due to its dependence on mechanistic explanations of natural phenomena, modern philosophy since Descartes ‘has the common defect that nature is not available for it and that it lacks a living ground’ could open new possibilities for thinking about the status of animals.<sup>10</sup> From the vantage point of nature-philosophy, there is no justification for the Cartesian reduction of animals to mere natural machines that act ‘according to the disposition of their organs.’<sup>11</sup> Yet the problem of animals becomes more complicated when we consider Descartes’ justification for the mechanistic explanation of animals: animals lack of their ability to use *logos* (a term that carries connotations of speech, reason, discursive thought, and language).<sup>12</sup> The philosophical anthropocentrism exhibited by Descartes is not merely a modern failing; it encompasses a much broader tradition stretching back to Aristotle, a tradition that, I will argue, Schelling does not escape. In numerous works on nature-philosophy, spanning from 1797 to 1809, Schelling repeatedly claims that animals, while not necessarily mere mechanical automatons, lack language (*logos*) and freedom. In the *First Outline of a System of*

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<sup>9</sup> Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents*, 8–9.

<sup>10</sup> Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *HF*], trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 26; *SW*, I/7: 356.

<sup>11</sup> René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985–1991), 141.

<sup>12</sup> Descartes contends that animals lack language or discourse because they do not communicate to other members of their species or to humans, while those that do speak—parrots or magpies—‘cannot show that they are thinking what they are saying’ (*Discourse on the Method*, 140).

*the Philosophy of Nature* (1799), he maintains that animals are 'selfless objects,' meaning that 'all ways of thinking a rationality in animal activities fail us, and with them all those explanations of the technical drive [*Kunsttrieb*] which presuppose a deliberation, a possibility of experience, of a tradition, and so forth, among animals.'<sup>13</sup> Later, in the 'Aphorisms as an Introduction to *Naturphilosophie*' (1805), he claims that animals are 'incessant somnambulists' who do not act of their own accord, but rather act insofar as their natural ground acts through them.<sup>14</sup> Then, in the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809, the so-called Freedom Essay), he argues that animals can never emerge from the dark ground of nature and thus lack the possibility for 'absolute or personal unity' (*HF*, 40; *SW*, I/7: 372).

Philosophical anthropocentrism takes it as a fundamental task to distinguish between humans and non-human animals, and on the basis of this distinction anthropocentrism presumes—or does not contravene—the idea that humans have dominion over all other animals and may use them as instruments for human ends. Thus, animals fall outside of moral consideration; humans owe them no direct obligations.<sup>15</sup> Descartes formulates this consequence with perspicuity: anthropocentrism is 'indulgent to human beings [...] since it absolves them from the suspicion of crime when they eat or kill animals.'<sup>16</sup> It is worth pausing at this point to note one other problem of anthropocentrism. As Matthew Calarco points out, the political ramifications of anthropocentrism extend beyond the exclusion of animals from moral consideration. He argues that 'the dominant trends in our culture have never been toward respect for the

<sup>13</sup> Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson (Albany, SUNY Press, 2004), 132; *SW*, I/3: 183.

<sup>14</sup> Schelling, 'Aphorisms as an Introduction to *Naturphilosophie*,' trans. Fritz Marti, in *Idealistic Studies* 14.3 (1984): 255; *SW*, I/7: 156.

<sup>15</sup> Some philosophers have formulated indirect duties to animals. However, as Steiner notes, indirect duties are not based on obligations toward animals; instead, they are significant for the cultivation of our own humanity. In reference to Kant's discussion of indirect duties, Steiner writes: 'It is wrong to be cruel to animals, not because we transgress against a moral bond with animals but because we violate a principle of respect for *humanity*—it is degrading to human beings to exercise cruelty, just as it is degrading to be wasteful or to fail to cultivate one's talents' (Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents*, 171).

<sup>16</sup> Descartes, 'Letter to [Henry] More, 5 February 1649,' in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 3, 366.

species as a whole but rather for what is considered to be *quintessentially* human—and this privilege and subject position have always been available only to a small subset of the human species.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the same anthropological arguments that distinguish humans from other animals have also served to exclude some humans from membership in humanity as a whole. Such political ramifications are especially pressing in the case of Schelling. In the *Historical-critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, he claims that indigenous South Americans are ‘merely externally humanlike races,’ and to defend the thesis that there is a common descent in the genealogy of Greco-Christian mythology—a common descent that buttresses his contention that Greco-Christian mythology is the basis of a properly universal humanity—Schelling casts doubt on the possibility that there is ‘any material agreement between the idioms of [indigenous South Americans] and the languages of *peoples proper*,’ thereby denying that indigenous peoples are *peoples* who have a *language* of community, religion, and mythology.<sup>18</sup>

In what follows, I will build a critical or negative case against Schelling’s anthropocentrism, isolating the impediments he raises against a non-anthropocentric nature-philosophy that is a desideratum of contemporary Schellingianism. This case will be provisional and non-exhaustive, but by focusing on the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* and the *Treatise on Human Freedom*, I will show that Schelling’s anthropocentrism is not an accidental feature of a particular iteration or phase of his thought. Instead, the privilege he accords to human beings, a privilege based on our capacity for *logos*, is a central feature of his philosophy. I will conclude by looking at the way that certain features of his absolute idealism or identity-philosophy could lay a positive theoretical groundwork for a non-anthropocentric nature-philosophy.

In the first presentation of his nature-philosophy, the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797), Schelling attempts to integrate, within what he later concedes is a flawed idiom, transcendental idealism and nature-philosophy. Despite the Fichtean idiom, Schelling offers a critique of

<sup>17</sup> Matthew Calarco, *Thinking Through Animals: Identity, Difference, Indistinction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 26.

<sup>18</sup> Schelling, *Historical-critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, trans. Mason Richey and Markus Zisselsberger (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 48, 82; *SW*, II/1: 63, 114. My emphasis.

Fichte's instrumental account of nature, in which the very ideal of the absolute self involves subsuming the world according to the self's practical goals. Indeed, Fichte's work epitomizes the two-worlds metaphysics attacked by Grant, as Fichte maintains that '[i]ntellect and thing are thus exact opposites: they inhabit two worlds between which there is no bridge.'<sup>19</sup> As a consequence, as Hegel will later write, Fichte exhibits 'nature as an absolute effect and as dead.'<sup>20</sup>

While Schelling affirms, in the Introduction to the *Ideas*, that philosophy is 'throughout a work of freedom' that extracts human activity from an immersion within the world, this extraction (separation, elevation) is not the goal of freedom but a means to gain a theoretical and practical grasp on humanity's place within the totality of nature.<sup>21</sup> This freedom, Schelling writes, is not destined to strive against an 'imaginary world,' but to allow man [*sic*] to 'exert all his powers upon a world which has influence upon him, lets him feel its forces, and upon which he can react [...] contact and reciprocal action must be possible between the two [mind and world], for only so does man become man' (*Ideas*, 10–11; *SW*, I/2: 13). Schelling sets a 'natural history' [*Naturlehre*] of the mind as part of the task of nature-philosophy, in which the philosopher traces the emergence of consciousness within nature (*Ideas*, 30; *SW*, I/2: 39). This task animates both the *Allgemeine Übersicht der neuesten philosophischen Literatur* (1797–1798) and the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800).<sup>22</sup> Schelling's genetic account of consciousness has two

<sup>19</sup> J.G. Fichte, 'First Introduction to the Science of Knowledge,' in *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 17; *J.G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *GA*], division I, vol. 4, ed. Erich Fuchs, Reinhard Lauth, and Hans Gliwitzky (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1964–2012), 196.

<sup>20</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, ed. and trans. H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977), 143; *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 4, ed. Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968–), 53.

<sup>21</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *Ideas*], trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 9; *SW*, I/2: 11.

<sup>22</sup> A second, revised edition of the *Allgemeine Übersicht* was published in Schelling's *Philosophische Schriften*; it is translated as 'Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the *Science of Knowledge*,' in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F. W. J. Schelling*, ed. and trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 61–138. What he calls a 'natural history' of the mind in the *Ideas* he calls, in the *Allgemeine Übersicht*, a 'history of self-consciousness' in which 'transcendental

advantages over prior forms of critical philosophy. First, as Dieter Sturma argues, Schelling's genetic account of the self's productivity or activity bypasses the 'immanent circularity' of Fichte's reflective account of self-consciousness.<sup>23</sup> Second, Schelling's genetic account of the self's productivity in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* emphasizes the productive unity of the self's activity, beginning with intellectual intuition, through a deduction of the categories as aspects of the self's productive powers, through the contradictions of practical reason, to a systematic resolution of the ideal and real in aesthetic intuition.<sup>24</sup> For a brief moment in 1800, the *System of Transcendental Idealism* seems to make good on Schelling's demand from the *Ideas* that philosophy demonstrate that 'Nature should be Mind made visible, Mind the invisible nature' (*Ideas*, 42; *SW*, I/2: 56). *Pace* Fichte, productivity is the bridge between intelligence and nature.

I mention this feature of Schelling's transcendental philosophy (through 1800) since it ought to have some bearing on the status of animals. If *Geist* (mind) proceeds along a continuum from simple to more complex forms, this progression should suggest that, even though humans possess faculties relatively more advanced than animals, these distinctions are differences of degree rather than kind. A distributive continuum of intelligence or *Geist* would undermine the absolute exclusion of non-human animals from ethical or moral consideration. I will present a Schellingian proof for this standpoint, followed by the arguments Schelling adduces for anthropocentrism.

A Schellingian proof that differences between humans and non-human animals are of degree rather than kind would begin by noting that sometimes Schelling suggests that *Geist* designates a sense of intelligence that has broader connotations than only naming a set of human faculties such as understanding, reason, or practical reason. He writes, for example, that

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philosophy aims by its very nature at the *becoming* and the *living*, for its first principles are *genetic*, and the mind becomes and grows together with the world' (90, 104; *SW*, I/1: 382, 403; translation modified).

<sup>23</sup> Dieter Sturma, 'The Nature of Subjectivity: The Critical and Systematic Function of Schelling's Philosophy of Nature,' in *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*, ed. Sally Sedgwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 219.

<sup>24</sup> I have discussed Schelling's accounts of the natural history of consciousness in more detail in *Freedom and Nature in Schelling's Philosophy of Art* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), especially 47–56, 63–87.

*Geist*, when considered as 'the principle of life,' is called 'soul' (*Ideas*, 38; *SW*, I/2: 51). It would then follow that living beings other than human beings could also be considered to have a soul or intelligence.<sup>25</sup> More specifically, Schelling could then proceed to claim that intelligence or life emerges in non-human animals in purposiveness or organization. Later, in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, the productivity of organization emerges at a relatively advanced stage in Schelling's deduction of the powers of theoretical reason. Thus, we ought to expect a concession that organisms with the capacity for organization or purposiveness exhibit some degree of intelligence. On this point, Schelling wavers. In the discussion of teleology in the *Ideas*, he writes:

1. 'Any conception of purpose can arise in an intelligence [or understanding: *einem Verstande*], and only in relation to such an intelligence can anything be called purposive.'
2. 'At the same time [...] the purposiveness of natural products dwells *in themselves*, that it is *objective* and *real*, hence that it belongs, not to your *arbitrary*, but to your *necessary* representations' (*Ideas*, 32; *SW*, I/2: 42–43).

The first claim asserts what is necessary for judgments about teleology, but the second affirms that, for purposiveness to be necessary, it must be '*objective* and *real*.' Barring a retreat to the claim that the *Geist* of natural organisms refers to the standpoint of divine intelligence reflecting upon its creation, or that organization is stamped on matter by an external divine intelligence, claims explicitly denied by Schelling (*Ideas*, 33; *SW*, I/2: 44), the conclusion ought to be that philosophy extends—recognizes—some degree of constitutive intelligence in natural organisms. Nonetheless, Schelling beats a different path of retreat from this consequence, through practical reason.

Schelling's concept of practical reason posits the priority of the subject. Although this priority is phrased in a Cartesian idiom—he claims that

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<sup>25</sup> It follows that this claim extends beyond animals to plants and other forms of organic organization. It is worth considering, if we follow this consequence, whether intelligence is appropriately descriptive of organic self-organization or whether it is anthropomorphizing.



self-consciousness rests on the ‘indubitable premise, that I *am, live, imagine, will*’ (*Ideas*, 39; *SW*, I/2: 51–52)—the *Ideas* contains *in nuce* many of the positions developed later in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*. Despite affirming the Cartesian premise that lends priority to thinking, this priority does not entail substance dualism, for the natural history of the mind exhibits the identity of subjective and natural productivity. Subjectivity is granted priority because it is necessary to explain how self-consciousness comes to externalize the world. Therefore, while the two-worlds hypothesis can be eliminated from philosophical explanation, self-consciousness cannot: it is through self-consciousness (thinking, willing) that the self is individualized and embodied.<sup>26</sup>

Although Schelling here pays tribute to the legacy of Cartesian subjectivity, he argues that the individuation of consciousness emerges as self-consciousness in relation to others. That is, while self-consciousness is an immediate awareness of thinking and embodied individuality, the individual only emerges practically through being compelled to acknowledge others (*Ideas*, 39; *SW*, I/2: 52). In the *System of Transcendental Idealism* the emergence of practical reason demarcates the point where unconscious, subjective production becomes self-conscious practical activity, individuating self-consciousness against other humans and the external world.<sup>27</sup> This emergence of self-consciousness, he states, is an absolute act that ‘cannot be conditioned by any of the preceding acts.’<sup>28</sup>

This—the practical emergence of self-consciousness—is a crucial moment for thinking through the status of animals. Schelling avers that, given that self-consciousness emerges through the acknowledgement of others, it is only through this act of recognition that individuality acquires moral purpose: ‘my moral existence only acquires purpose and

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<sup>26</sup> See Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, 188: ‘Schelling’s naturalistic realism offers a counterpoint to the eliminativist strategy in contemporary neurophilosophy: if ideation is electrochemistry, electrochemistry grounds, rather and undermines, all ideation. Therefore, to eliminate one ideation (that has its electrochemical grounds) in favour of another cannot be grounded in physics.’

<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Schelling argues that the practical separation of the causality of freedom and natural causality is a transcendental illusion that is nonetheless practically necessary. See *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 176–185; *SW*, I/3: 558–570.

<sup>28</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 155; *SW*, I/3: 533.

direction through the existence of other moral beings' (*Ideas*, 39; *SW*, I/2: 53–54). If we raise the 'curious question' as to whether these others include non-human animals, 'whether animals also have souls,' Schelling responds with the following:

a person of common sense is at once taken aback, because, with the affirmation of that, he would consider himself committed to something, which he has the right and authority to assert only of himself and those like him. (*Ideas*, 39–40; *SW*, I/2: 53, translation modified)

After this appeal to common sense, Schelling drops the topic. What are we to make with his curt dismissal of the problem of animal others? I have already outlined an interpretation of the *Ideas* that would establish that differences between humans and animals are differences of degree and not kind. On this account, these differences of degree could be mapped onto the continuum leading from simple to complex acts of *Geist*. This approach has the advantage of accepting the differences between humans and animals, while acknowledging that the less complex dynamics of intelligence and their modes of relating to the environment would be shared by humans and non-human animals. However, if this were Schelling's position, he could not categorically exclude non-human animals from the sphere of moral existence. It would remain possible, given the shared features of human and non-human *Geist*, that humans would owe some form of moral consideration to non-human animals, or at least *some* non-human animals.

Instead, Schelling builds a systematic case against including animals in moral considerations. He contends that the only external beings who merit moral consideration as 'spiritual' equals (that is, beings possessing *Geist*) are those beings 'between whom and myself giving and receiving, *doing and suffering*, are fully reciprocal' (*Ideas*, 39; *SW*, I/2: 53, my emphasis). But Schelling should not, at this point, be able to appeal to the principle of spiritual equality of beings, when precisely this principle is in question. The boundaries that he establishes between those beings who act and who suffer like us, and those who do not, affirm a much more pernicious boundary: those beings with whom we share no reciprocity do not act and do not suffer because they do not act or suffer *like*

*we do*. To dismiss the ‘curious question’ of whether animals are owed any moral obligations absolves humans, as Descartes writes, of ‘the suspicion of crime’ when we humans assert our dominion over animals and exploit them to our ends.

Later, in Book II of the *Ideas*, Schelling argues that it is ‘mark of man’s nature (whereby it differs from that of the animal) that he knows and enjoys the real only to the extent that he is able to raise himself above it’ (*Ideas*, 174; *SW*, I/2: 218). Freedom, he claims, elevates humans above an immersion in a world of natural forces, and this elevation allows humans to know and enjoy nature, the real, fully. Now, the difference between humans and animals is not based on the Cartesian distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. But Schelling distinguishes between mind and natural forces. Both, he maintains, proceed from an analogous contradiction between producing and limit. Mind is the conflict between the unlimited or infinite activity of freedom and the limitations of reflection, which gives determinacy to the self’s activity and representations; nature as a totality is both the productivity of natural forces (*natura naturans*) and products, determinate natural objects (*natura naturata*). Although they are analogous—which allows the mind to interact with natural forces—natural forces are not intelligent. As Schelling writes in 1799, though animals act in such a way to suggest an analogy with reason that ‘what we call “reason” [in the case of animals] is a mere play of higher and necessarily unknown natural forces.’<sup>29</sup>

To return to the *Ideas*, Schelling avers that animals are restricted to reactivity. Although humans and other animals share the physical basis of sensibility and irritability—again suggesting that differences between humans and animals could be one of degree—Schelling maintains that ‘[o]nly through excitation *from without* is the animal determined to movement, and conversely, only through this capacity to produce movement in itself does external impression become stimulus’ (*Ideas*, 36; *SW*, I/2: 48, my emphasis). In the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling formalizes these categorical differences: humans act—produce—through self-consciousness freedom, while nature remains confined to the realm

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<sup>29</sup> Schelling, introduction to *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 195; *SW*, I/3: 273–274.

of objective, unconscious (*bewußtlos*) production. As I have already mentioned, humans become self-conscious of other humans and the external world through practical activity, while nature—even as organization—remains below this threshold of consciousness. Indeed, the priority accorded to aesthetic intuition is based on the distinction between conscious and unconscious production. Natural objects, Schelling notes, demonstrate the same identity of subject and object presented in the work of art, but the latter is produced *with consciousness*. The identity of subject and object in nature—in, for example, the interaction of concept and matter in the purposiveness in natural organisms—must be explained by natural forces rather than intelligence. Animals will never know or enjoy the nature of the creative freedom possessed by humans. While he rejects the Cartesian distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* that confines nature and animals to a world of mechanism, Schelling affirms anthropocentrism through the categorical distinction between a human world that is elevated above nature through self-conscious freedom and aesthetic intuition and an animal nature driven by natural forces. No wonder Schelling finds it curious that one would inquire about the moral status of animals.

Thus, Schelling's philosophy—through the period of his most extensive engagement with transcendental or critical philosophy—makes a systematic case for anthropocentrism. Since Schelling subsequently undertakes a thoroughgoing critique of the principles of Kantian philosophy, I will investigate whether or not his later work undermines the anthropocentrism of his earlier work. In the present discussion, I will focus on the Freedom Essay, where he presents the claim that modern philosophy since Descartes 'has the common defect that nature is not available for it and that it lacks a living ground' (*HF*, 26; *SW*, I/7: 356). Given that Schelling there aims to develop a 'vital concept of freedom' through the 'fundamental principles of a true philosophy of nature,' we should expect that he is preparing the reader for an implicit critique of his earlier work so that the principles of the Freedom Essay are evaluated on their own merit (*HF*, 23, 27; *SW*, I/7: 352; 357). Indeed, although Schelling acknowledges that transcendental idealism produced 'the first complete concept of formal freedom,' Kantian and post-Kantian concepts of freedom are still marred by this formalism (*HF*, 21; *SW*, I/7: 351). As Iain Hamilton

Grant notes, Schelling attacks the idea that once we accept the ‘radical independence of the moral subject [...] nothing exists outside ourselves, only a subjective *Ich*, only the human race,’ which amounts to the ‘final death blow to nature.’<sup>30</sup> In this sense, Schelling’s earlier accounts of the genesis of self-consciousness and practical reason reiterates, in genetic form, the anthropocentrism of Kant’s ethics, in which only persons—persons being those beings who possess autonomy, rationality, and legislative will (and thus no non-human animals, for Kant, can be considered persons)—merit moral respect. It is on the basis of human reason and autonomy that humanity has dominion over nature; due to being, as Kant himself puts it, ‘the sole being on earth who has reason, and thus a capacity to set voluntary ends for himself, [man] is certainly the titular lord of nature.’<sup>31</sup>

Now, the Schelling of the *Ideas* does not explicitly endorse individual tenets of Kant’s anthropocentrism, but he does determine that animals fall beyond the pale of moral existence, and this determination is established in his discussions of practical reason. And while his philosophy of art, as well as its intuition of a form of free activity that is creative and inventive rather than rule oriented, subverts the systematic primacy that Kant and Fichte give practical reason, Schelling maintains that practical reason is a necessary part of a complete system of philosophy. With the philosophy of freedom outlined in the Freedom Essay, however, he collapses the schematic separation of faculties in order to establish the natural and historical emergence of freedom *through* nature. Grant reads Schelling’s critique of Kantian ethics as a ‘naturalistic protest’ against ‘the radical independence of the moral subject,’ as a rejection of ethical projects *tout court*.<sup>32</sup> Certainly, as we have seen, the post-Kantian framework of the *Ideas* fails to self-critique its own anthropocentrism, but I do not think this failure warrants the outright rejection of ethical consideration.

<sup>30</sup> Grant, ‘The Hypothesis of Nature’s Logic in Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*,’ in *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism*, 492. The quotation is a modified translation of a passage from Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars*, in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory*, 215; SW, I/7: 445.

<sup>31</sup> Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 298, §83; *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, ed. Königlich Preussischen (later Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols (Berlin: Georg Reimer [later Walter de Gruyter], 1900–), 431.

<sup>32</sup> Grant, ‘The Hypothesis of Nature’s Logic in Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*,’ 492.

Nor, for that matter, does the Schelling of the Freedom Essay, for the 'true principles' of nature-philosophy reveal the path toward the 'real and vital concept [...] that freedom is the capacity for good and evil' (*HF*, 23; *SW*, I/7: 352).

The Freedom Essay is a notoriously dense and difficult text, and, in order to follow the thread of our problem—the problem of the status of animals in Schelling's work—I cannot do complete justice to its complexity here. In it, Schelling develops conceptions of divine essence and ground (a dynamic nature of unconscious drives or forces) that are unprecedented in both his work and the history of philosophy. As Werner Marx summarizes it, divine essence is 'supposed to perform the function of unifying, justifying, and guaranteeing all finite human freedom, as well as the freedom of nature, by "grounding" them in something infinite and absolute without abolishing the independence of finitude.'<sup>33</sup> Conversely, moreover, human freedom finds its place—the *centrum*, as Schelling says—as 'an active collaborator in the play of the realization of divine love,' the latter being the purpose of creation.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, Schelling's evocation of a 'vital concept' of freedom entails more than a formal definition of free choice and more than a biological definition of life. As I will argue, it is personality that names this life of freedom, a personality premised on the capacity of a being to raise itself above nature—a necessity for God, a possibility for humanity, and an impossibility for animals. Therefore, despite Schelling's self-critique of his earlier work, the system of the Freedom Essay remains anthropocentric.

In order to account for the differences between how God (as a personal God), humans, and animals relate to nature, Schelling introduces a crucial distinction between being as existence and being as ground (*HF*, 27; *SW*, I/7: 357). Far from undermining his vital concept of freedom, Schelling argues that opposition—such as the oppositions between existence and ground or God and nature—is necessary for the emergence of unity, life, and essence. At one point early in the Freedom Essay, he contends that 'every essence can only reveal itself in its opposite, love only in

<sup>33</sup> Werner Marx, *The Philosophy of F.W.J. Schelling: History, System, and Freedom*, trans. Thomas Nenon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 64.

<sup>34</sup> Marx, *The Philosophy of F.W.J. Schelling*, 82.

hate, unity in conflict;’ later he claims that without struggle, there is no life (*HF*, 41, 63; *SW*, I/7: 373, 400). Therefore the unity of God is not undermined by His self-separation from nature, but rather His unity is premised on this separation, what Schelling will refer to as a separation of two principles: divine spirit (the principle of light) and the dark principle of nature. Indeed, even the order and stability of nature is only possible through its emergence as separate from God. He argues that God emerges as unity by expelling and subordinating nature, the dark principle, as His ground. But the central difficulty is to think that which precedes God’s self-revelation. Schelling insists that God is the *prius* of all that exists, even His ground—‘nothing is prior to, or outside of, God’ (*HF*, 27; *SW*, I/7: 357). For God to emerge through self-revelation, there must be some paradoxical moment before existence and ground. Schelling calls it both non-ground (*Ungrund*) and absolute indifference (*Indifferenz*) (*HF*, 68; *SW*, I/7: 406). He contends that when God comes to exist, nature emerges as dependent and relative to God’s existence. That is, nature emerges as ground only on the basis of God’s existence. If God did not exist, if there were no opposition between the principle of light and the dark principle, then nature would not be ground. Conversely, a personal God could not exist without ground, for in personality there is life, ‘and all personality rests on a dark ground’ (*HF*, 75; *SW*, I/7: 413). Thus as non-ground or absolute indifference there is no actual—but merely potential—relation between God and nature, existence and ground.

In His self-revelation God comes to exist and nature emerges as ground. Although Schelling refers to this opposition of existence and ground as the opposition of the principles of light and dark, at this initial moment of revelation the conflict between good and evil has not yet emerged. Good and evil are only possible through human freedom, through an ‘inversion’ of principles, when self-will elevates the dark ground to the ruling principle of freedom. The unity of God—that He exists through the subordination of nature and the dark principle as ground—is, according to Schelling, ‘indissoluble;’ God is always elevated over nature. In addition, nature, despite being animated by a dark principle, is not in itself evil. Schelling ascribes darkness to nature for two reasons. First, nature’s principle is ‘dark’ because it is illuminated, as it were, by the light of divine spirit, but it remains impossible that nature could act through

divine spirit. Second, nature is dark because there remains, in its separation from God, an 'indivisible remainder' of ground that is incomprehensible to the understanding (*HF*, 29; *SW*, I/7: 360). Both of these characteristics of darkness are evident in Schelling's account of animals. The dark principle acts in animals, but it is not evil, nor is it '*spirit* and understanding but blind craving and desire; in short, no fall, no separation of principles is possible here where there is still no absolute or personal unity' (*HF*, 40; *SW*, I/7: 372). Animals by definition lack spirit and freedom; they are incapable of emerging from their immersion in the natural world. As we will see, animals are excluded from the possession of spirit, understanding, or consciousness by virtue of falling below the threshold of *logos*, the divine word.

By contrast to God or animals, human freedom—as the capacity for good and evil—is defined by the conflict between the two principles. Schelling argues that human freedom must be different from divine freedom or else God as spirit, and more importantly, as divine love, would not be revealed. The indissoluble relation between principles in God is severed in human freedom: the 'same unity that is inseverable in God must therefore be severable in man—and this is the possibility of good and evil' (*HF*, 33; *SW*, I/7: 364). Thus, humans are unlike any other animal. It is not necessary to elaborate the specifics of Schelling's account of evil in the present discussion. I have analyzed the Freedom Essay with one goal—to isolate the specific characteristic of human being that separates humans from, and elevates them above, non-human animals, and this is accomplished by the fact that the conflict of good and evil plays out in human freedom.

There is one other important aspect of human freedom that I have left aside until now: the role of human freedom in divine revelation. At the initial stage of revelation—the emergence of God's existence and nature as ground—God is not yet the personal God of Christianity. On Schelling's account, only with a second revelation, of divine love, does God become a personal God. In effect, God needs human freedom for divine love to be fully revealed through the divine Word: 'Only in man, therefore, is the word fully proclaimed which in all other things is held back and incomplete. But spirit, that is, *God* as existing *actu*, reveals itself in the proclaimed word' (*HF*, 32; *SW*, I/7: 363–364). For that reason,



‘Man is hence the redeemer of nature toward which all typology in nature aims’ (*HF*, 72–73; *SW*, I/7: 411).

While acknowledging that humans play a central role in this account of revelation, Jason Wirth argues that ‘Schelling is not here [in the *Freedom Essay*] simply elevating the ego of humanity over the degraded figure of animality.’<sup>35</sup> To support this claim, he cites the following passage:

Animals are never able to emerge from unity, whereas man can voluntarily tear apart the eternal bond of forces. Hence Fr. Baader is right to say it would be desirable that the corruption in man were only to go so far as his becoming animal [*Tierwerdung*]; unfortunately, however, man can stand only below or above animals. (*HF*, 40; *SW*, I/7: 372–373)

Although Schelling does not privilege the ego, the *Ich*, as the threshold between humans and other animals, he does maintain that humanity is elevated above animals insofar as ‘the human is that which attempts to articulate the word of nature so that it preserves not only the expressed but also the expresser;’ through the word, humans express both the light and the dark principles.<sup>36</sup> As I have claimed, it is by a singular and necessary relation to the divine word that humanity can redeem nature. It is more difficult to parse what Schelling could mean by stating that ‘man can stand only below or above animals.’ As we have seen, at an ontological level, it would be impossible for humans to stand below animals, because human freedom is defined by the capacity to act through the divine and the dark principles, and while animals might, on his account, blindly follow the inherent light of creation, they remain bound to the dark principle. By contrast, humans have the greater power, the higher potency, to will either love or evil. For Schelling, unlike much of the philosophical tradition, evil is not a lack or deficiency, but a positive power; for him to now claim that evil places humans below animals ontologically speaking would be to return to treating it as a deficiency or lack. Thus, Schelling must mean such a claim in a moral, metaphorical sense: that humans can do better than animals, through the resolution to do good,

<sup>35</sup> Jason M. Wirth, ‘Animalization: Schelling and the Problem of Expressivity,’ in *Schelling Now: Contemporary Readings*, ed. Jason M. Wirth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 86.

<sup>36</sup> Wirth, ‘Animalization,’ 88.

or do worse, through the evil of elevating the will to annihilation over divine love (see *HF*, 54–55; *SW*, I/7: 389–391). In either case, humans remain ontologically and teleologically privileged over animals. Since humanity is the privileged site of *logos*, since human beings are those who through freedom decide how the divine word is to be fulfilled as either the redemption or the annihilation of nature, the nature-philosophy of the Freedom Essay remains anthropocentric.

I have concluded that Schelling fails to extricate his nature-philosophy from the anthropocentrism that guides much of the philosophical tradition. However, Schelling's contemporaries did not necessarily understand his work in this way. In a letter dated 26 November, 1807, a month and a half after presiding over Schelling's address to the *Akademie der Wissenschaften* in Munich 'Concerning the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature,' Friedrich Jacobi writes that:

Schelling's creation of the world [*Weltschöpfer*] produces, from a world without end, nothing other than time [...]. The one nontemporal Life [...] is transformed into an infinitely multiple transience so that Life is lived. There is only one quality, Life as such. All other qualities or properties are only different quantities or restrictions of this one quality, which is at the same time substance and all reality [*Wesen*]. Mankind has thereby more [reality] than the dung beetle, but in itself nothing better or higher. All that lives only lives the one and the same Life.<sup>37</sup>

As I have written elsewhere, this is an inaccurate description of 'Concerning the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature,' in which Schelling explicates a natural-historical account of artistic production and in which the history of art recapitulates the progressive potenziation of nature.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the address anticipates the philosophical underpinnings of the Freedom Essay. However, Jacobi's account could fit some of the presentations, published between 1801–1806, of what Schelling called identity-philosophy or absolute idealism. It would be remarkable if Schelling had outlined a nature-philosophy that had bypassed the problems of anthropocentrism

<sup>37</sup> Jacobi to Fries, 26 November 1807, in Schelling, *Über das Verhältnis der bildenden Künste zu der Natur*, ed. Lucia Sziborsky (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1983), 74.

<sup>38</sup> Shaw, *Freedom and Nature in Schelling's Philosophy of Art*, chapter 5.

only to reverse course with the Freedom Essay. This is not the case, but in the 'Aphorisms as an Introduction to *Naturphilosophie*' Schelling struggles to reconcile his claim that the absolute identity of subject and object is the unity of opposites with his denial that animals possess subjectivity in some sense. In § 72, he argues that animals exhibit a capacity for perception that undermines the 'abstraction' at the basis of Cartesian dualism, that matter is 'something wherein all subjective inner life and all perception is negated.'<sup>39</sup> And yet he denies that animals can act on their own; instead, there is an objective ground that enables the 'meaningfulness' of their actions, which, while 'objective in regard to the animals, is yet similar to a conscious principle, in spite of the lack of consciousness.' Here, as in the 'Introduction to the Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature,' Schelling concedes only that animals act through a nature that is *similar to* but *is not* consciousness.

The problem, though, is that the absolute distinction between human subjectivity and the incessant somnambulism of animals fails on account of the very principles of absolute idealism itself. In the *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (1801), Schelling lays the groundwork for a non-anthropocentric account of nature-philosophy. In the 'Presentation,' Schelling maintains that the absolute, as the identity of subject and object, admits of no qualitative difference. Applying qualitative differences (the categories of reality, negation, and limitation) would imply that the absolute in its reality can be negated or limited; in either case, were the absolute to admit negation or limitation, it would not be absolute. To account for individuality and finitude, Schelling argues that an individual exists as a potency of the absolute, that is, a 'magnitude of being, such that the same identity is posited [as subject and object], but with a predominance of subjectivity or objectivity.'<sup>40</sup> Likening subjectivity and objectivity to the 'Spinozistic attributes of absolute substance, thought and extension,' he writes: '[t]hought and extension are thus never separated in anything,

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<sup>39</sup> Schelling, 'Aphorisms as an Introduction to *Naturphilosophie*,' 255; *SW*, I/7: 156. All further references to this text are drawn from the paragraph cited here.

<sup>40</sup> Schelling, *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, in Fichte and Schelling, *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence (1800–1802)*, ed. and trans. Michael G. Vater and David W. Wood (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 151; *SW*, I/4: 123.

not even in thought and in extension, but are without exception [everywhere] together and identical.'<sup>41</sup>

Here we arrive at the threshold of a non-anthropocentric account of nature; Schelling is arguing that at no point is there an individual in which thought or extension is entirely absent. This account of the potencies undermines the ground of his later claim, in the 'Aphorisms,' that the activities of animals and 'their artfulness' can be explained *by analogy* to reason. Instead, Schelling should concede that there is some degree of intelligence—subjectivity—in animals. We could no longer predetermine the limits and degrees of this intelligence in humans and other animals according to anthropocentric norms. Instead, from the standpoint of this potency theory, there could be a plurality of intelligences of varying and diverse magnitudes among the multitude of finite beings (humans and non-human animals, and possibly other forms of life). Perhaps, then, Schelling's absolute idealism would converge with what, from the standpoint of critical animal studies, Matthew Calarco calls indistinction theory, an approach that no longer takes 'distinctions between human beings and animals as the chief point of departure for thought and practice,' which—unlike the utilitarian approach of Singer or the deontological approach of Regan—considers not only animals like us, but also the 'fate of animals and other beings who lack the key capacities that would establish the grounds for basic ethical consideration.'<sup>42</sup> As Jason Wirth notes, if take we nature as the image of thought, there is 'no problem or theme that philosophy can dismiss in advance.'<sup>43</sup> Perhaps, then, the critique of anthropocentrism provides an unlikely vindication for Schelling's absolute idealism and points to the ways in which Schelling's thought can still provide, despite problems that we can now readily recognize, important resources for contemporary philosophy.

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<sup>41</sup> Schelling, *Presentation*, 158/SW, I/4: 136.

<sup>42</sup> Calarco, *Thinking Through Animals*, 51, 50.

<sup>43</sup> Wirth, 'Nature of Imagination,' 458.

# 5

## The Non-existence of the Absolute: Schelling's *Treatise On Human Freedom*

Cem Kömürçü

### 1 Introduction

Schelling's philosophy is based on the idea of a semantic ground that ever precedes world and language. In his *Treatise On Human Freedom*, Schelling calls this semantic ground 'the ruleless,' the '*Regellose*,'<sup>1</sup> an uncertain state of lawlessness that defies rule while giving the impression that it might break into world and language at any time—but in fact does not. Not only does the '*Regellose*' seem inaccessible to us, indeed contradictory to each possible rule; more drastically, it also creates the very

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<sup>1</sup> See F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *HF*], trans. J. Love and J. Schmidt (New York: SUNY Press, 2006), 29–30; *SW*, I/7: 360–361. Citations of Schelling provide the pagination of the English translation if one exists, followed by that of the *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, 14 vols, ed. Karl Friedrich August Schelling (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J. G. Cotta, 1856–61), unless a text was not published as part of it. References to the K.F.A. Schelling edition are given by the abbreviation *SW*, division, volume and page number. The translators opt to render '*Regellosen*' as 'anarchy' instead of the more literal 'ruleless'.

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conditions for any possible rule or law and thus is that which delivers world and language. In a similar sense, Jacques Derrida speaks of 'trace,' 'écriture,' or 'différance.' Hence, both Schelling and Derrida are thinkers of what one may designate as an 'infinite finitude' in that, for each, there is *always already* something within any system that denies the system itself by going beyond the inherent limitations of the latter.

Here we may in particular mention how, in his writings of the 1990s, Derrida analyzes pre-linguistic paradoxes such as the gift or the law. These paradoxical figures aim to strikingly demonstrate that Hegel's *Aufhebung* just does not work. There is always what has been called an indivisible remainder that fights against dialectic completion. It is in this context that Derrida introduces, in *L'écriture et la différence*, the problem of the transcendental force in dealing with Levinas' philosophy (in the famous chapter 'Violence et métaphysique').<sup>2</sup> Two concepts are of the utmost importance: *rationality* and *empiricism*. Schelling, as Derrida explains, went very far in mediating between them, and it is clear that, by bringing these concepts into play, he is referring to Schelling's own distinction between negative and positive philosophy in the late *Philosophy of Revelation* (*Philosophie der Offenbarung*), which, it must be noted, also contains a decisive critique of Hegel. According to Schelling, Hegel's philosophy remains captured by a radical rationality because it only takes into account negative philosophy, that is, philosophy that strives to grasp all that is through logical principles alone. However, negative philosophy requires positive philosophy. For Schelling, this means that the true beginning of thought is not thinking itself; it is the very thing that precedes thinking, forever out of its grasp. Consequently, the end of positive philosophy is not the beginning of negative philosophy. Positive philosophy deals with the 'Regellose' that precedes, interrupts, yet makes possible, all forms of negation. Therefore, it is not surprising that it is precisely by relying on Schelling that Derrida discovers the major task of philosophy, that is, to mediate between empiricism and metaphysics, finitude and infinitude.<sup>3</sup>

But what is the mediator here? It is the permanently vanishing Absolute that Schelling first introduced in his *Treatise On Human Freedom* of 1809. The Absolute, as he there states, does not exist insofar as it does not appear as such. Indeed, it cannot appear because it is 'indifferent' to existence and appearance.

<sup>2</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, 225.

And that means that the Absolute lies *within* difference (*in-der-Differenz*) between existence and the obscure ground of existence; it is for that precise reason that it is absolute indifference (*Indifferenz*). In the history of philosophy this point of indifference has often been misleadingly grasped, according to the principle of sufficient reason, as the reason of things. In 1809 Schelling, trying to rectify this problem, calls this the inaccessible and inexpressible non-ground (*der Ungrund*), which he previously called in his early *Philosophy of Nature* the unconditioned (*das Unbedingte*). But if this permanently vanishing absolute is that which makes possible the distinction between existence and the ground of existence in the first place, this entails that we, when we do philosophy, can never exit it. As Iain Grant puts it: ‘The philosophical exposition of the unconditioned, or Absolute, is not like the analysis of a concept or state of affairs; rather, the exposition of the Absolute occurs within the Absolute, as the medium of its own exposition.’<sup>4</sup> This is why Schelling says in the *Further Presentations of My System* that ‘[p]hilosophy is entirely and thoroughly only in the Absolute’ (*SW*, I/4: 388).<sup>5</sup> But, once again, this Absolute, as I argue, does not exist as such (or at least not yet). How, then, can we come to know it at all? My suggestion would be to read the non-ground as the absolute and ultimate background where art and especially poetry enters the scene. In this regard, while I will mostly focus on Schelling’s *Treatise On Human Freedom*, I also will briefly touch upon some basic ideas from other thinkers like Spinoza, Heidegger, Fichte, Coleridge, and Wittgenstein to show how Schelling’s unique metaphysics continues to offer us new material for understanding how art and philosophy can come together.

## 2 The Problem of the Ground

Why are the so-called ‘German Idealists’—especially Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel—so obsessed with the idea of the Absolute? What exactly is the Absolute, the Absolute I or Absolute Knowledge? Why do they try, with so much passion, to say everything about everything instead of just

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<sup>4</sup>Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* (London/New York: Continuum, 2008), 1.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted from: Grant, *Philosophies of Nature*, 1.

being satisfied with saying something about something?<sup>6</sup> Drawing upon the filmmaker David Lynch, one could say that the German Idealists treat the Absolute as if it were a fish: 'If you want to catch little fish, you can stay in the shallow water. But if you want to catch the big fish, you've got to go deeper.'<sup>7</sup> To push the metaphor even further, the German Idealists appear to be looking for the biggest fish of all. And this is why Schelling in particular was driven, as we shall see, to reformulate the classical metaphysical question: '*Why is there something and not nothing?*'<sup>8</sup> Arguably, no answer to this question is even possible. Whatever would explain why there is something rather than nothing is *itself* something to be explained and therefore not nothing. Even nothing exists insofar as it *is* nothing. The question is, nonetheless, of urgent importance: it is a matter of being and non-being, of existence and non-existence, a question that is, self-evidently, of great significance for us as beings who exist. The question 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' is therefore a question of existence and its ultimate meaning. But what does existence mean? Existence, as I understand it following Markus Gabriel, means nothing else than appearance:

What appears comes forth, it starts from a certain background. This is what both the etymology of 'appearance' and 'existence' suggest. [...A]pppearance and existence in many languages refer to the coming forth or standing out of objects against a certain background. The Latin 'existere' quite literally means 'to stand forth' and it also just means 'to appear', 'to enter the scene'. [...M]any expressions for 'existence' are locative in nature.<sup>9</sup> (FS, 166)

Throughout his philosophical development, Schelling, one of the most interesting German thinkers, was primarily concerned with the philosophical problem of how conditioned, determined things *appear* or *come*

<sup>6</sup> Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>7</sup> David Lynch, *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2006), 1.

<sup>8</sup> See F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. A. Bowie (Cambridge: University Press, 1982), 115; *SW*, I/10: 100–1.

<sup>9</sup> Markus Gabriel, *Fields of Sense: A New Realist Ontology* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as FS] (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 166.



forth out of a prior, absolutely unconditioned state of affairs. That is why Schelling asks: ‘*The whole world is thoroughly caught in reason, but the question is: how did it get caught in the network of reason in the first place?*’<sup>10</sup> The main emphasis in this question is to be put on the word ‘how,’ which comes to substitute the traditional ‘why,’ Schelling is asking about the very manner in which finitude emerges at all and the relation it bears to its unconditioned foundation. Here one is easily reminded of a major aspect of Kantian philosophy. Schelling’s problem concerning how reason and therefore world appear is in a certain sense related to Kant’s epistemological problem outlined in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: how does the empirical world come forth from its transcendental ground? Given that the unconditioned, foundational principle is self-caused, there is absolutely no reason why it should give rise to something other than itself.<sup>11</sup>

To express this Schellingian matter differently, what is prior to existence? Or what is the very beginning of existence? In this context, we can refer to Heidegger’s essay *Das Ding* (*The Thing*) as a way to broach the problem, thereby also showing the degree to which Heidegger was influenced by the philosophical ideas he picked up on through his seminar on Schelling’s *Treatise On Human Freedom*:

All distances in time and space are shrinking [...]. Yet the frantic abolition of all distances brings no nearness, for nearness does not consist in shortness of distance [...]. How can we come to know [...] the nature [of nearness]? [...] Near to us are what we usually call things. But what is the thing? [...] What in the thing is thingily? What is the thing in itself? We shall not reach the thing in itself until our thinking has first reached the thing as a thing.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Grundlegung der positiven Philosophie: Münchner Vorlesung WS 1832/33 und SS 1833*, ed. H. Fuhrmans (Torino: Bottega d’Erasmus, 1972), 222; quoted from Slavoj Žižek, *The Abyss of Freedom*, in *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, by Slavoj Žižek and F.W.J. Schelling (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>11</sup> However, we should be careful here. It is not that Schelling understands Kant’s philosophy by making the transcendental ideal into something determinate; instead, he understands Kant’s first *Critique* in purely ontological—and therefore precisely not in transcendental—terms, as Wolfram Högerebe has shown. That means, once again, he understands it in terms of the question ‘Why is there something and not nothing?’ See *Prädikation und Genesis. Metaphysik als Fundamentalheuristik im Ausgang von Schellings ‘Die Weltalter’* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 66–71.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘The Thing,’ in *Poetry, Language and Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper, 1971), 163–164.

Close to the end of the essay Heidegger adds: 'Thinking in this way, we are called by the thing as the thing. In the strict sense of the German word *bedingt*, we are the be-thinged, the conditioned ones. We have left behind us the presumption of all unconditionedness.'<sup>13</sup> But unconditionedness, as Schelling understands it, is *not*, strictly speaking, the condition of appearing (of existence, of being be-thinged). The condition of appearing and therefore of existence would rather be what Schelling calls the 'ground of existence.' Here we must proceed carefully. As Markus Gabriel has pointed out, the German word '*Grund*' should be not be universally translated, as it is often done, as 'reason' or 'cause' (*FS*, 258). The *ground of existence* is, in fact, nothing but the ontological region or place where something comes forth and, by coming forth, exists (*FS*, 258). Heidegger's famous essay *Der Satz vom Grund*, usually erroneously translated as *The Principle of Sufficient Reason*, thus does not deal with any principle at all. Instead, it plays on a Schellingian theme inasmuch as Heidegger, following Schelling, is more interested in the idea of coming forth from a certain source. Furthermore, it is also important to highlight that the German word '*Satz*' 'does not only mean "sentence", "principle" or "proposition", but also a "leap". "Einen Satz machen" means "to pounce", "to lunge", "to make a leap"' (*FS*, 258). In this way, the title of Heidegger's *Satz vom Grund* should be more precisely understood as indicating a 'take off from the ground.' It is a take off that, by the very act of taking off, *itself* draws a distinction between the ground and that which takes off from the ground. And this is exactly what both Heidegger and Schelling are looking for: namely, the existential difference between the condition of appearing and that which appears (*FS*, 258).

It is this existential difference that Schelling is getting at when he, in his *Treatise On Human Freedom*, distinguishes between 'essence insofar as it is merely the ground of existence' and 'essence insofar as it exists' (*HF*, 27; *SW*, I/7: 357; translation modified). But Schelling is not content with just drawing such a distinction. More primordially, he is wondering what its ground might be. And this is precisely why he tries to ground the distinction in the indifferent and void essence called, paradoxically, the 'non-ground' (*Ungrund*) (*HF*, 46; *SW*, I/7: 406), that is, the ground

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, 'The Thing,' 178–179.

*before* it becomes the ground of existence (and which, therefore, cannot strictly speaking be called a ground at all). At numerous occasions between 1811 and 1815, Schelling makes the same point in the fragments of his *Ages of the World*, a series of attempts to describe the nature of time and creation. Here his fundamental thesis is that the Beginning is not at the beginning. There is always something that is prior to the beginning (that is, the above existential distinction) as such; we might call this endlessly retreating Beginning of the therefore non-existing Absolute. It is due to this ever-elusive Beginning that the three existing drafts only contain the first part of the planned trilogy narrating the epochs of the Past, Present, and Future. In the words of Žižek: ‘They are interrupted at the crucial point of giving an account of the differentiation between Past and Present,’<sup>14</sup> that is, between ground prior to existence and ground as the ground of existence, a ground from which something has successfully come forth. Consequently, the problem of the Beginning—which is not only a problem in Schelling’s philosophy but also the key feature of German Idealism, especially of Fichte’s and Hegel’s philosophy in particular—is the problem of the ‘*phenomenalization*.’<sup>15</sup> In other words, how do things appear?

### 3 The Problem of the Non-ground

It seems that everything that exists comes up from the deepest level that is always already the highest. Wherever an existent comes forth, its ground necessarily lies outside the categories of something and nothing because both are possible options for it. Consequently, this ground that makes things possible is itself even less than non-existent; it must, in some sense, lie beyond—if beyond is even an apt expression—all categories, for it is always situated yonder these possibilities. In his *Treatise On Human Freedom* Schelling calls it ‘the highest point of the entire investigation’ (HF, 68; SW, I/7: 406), for ground prior to being the ground of existence is that which neither exists nor does not exist, and at the same it does exist

<sup>14</sup> Žižek, *Abyss of Freedom*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Žižek, *Abyss of Freedom*, 15.

and does not exist. It is that which is indifferent, which means that the two positions of the relation (existence and non-existence) are equally valid (*gleicherweise/gleichgültig*), but not the same (*zugleich/einanderlei*). Interestingly, Schelling believes that this metaphysics is, in fact, also at the heart of language. For to claim that  $A = B$  is to claim that there is an  $X$  (*das Band/die Copula*) that in one respect is  $A$  and in another  $B$  (HF, 13; SW, I/7: 341). To make any proposition at all that is true therefore presupposes that there is an  $X$  and that, whatever this  $X$  may be, it is also something indifferent to  $A$  and  $B$ ; it lies *in the difference* (*in der Differenz*) between  $A$  and  $B$ , the subject and its predicate.<sup>16</sup>

Whatever exists, exists because it is distinguished from whatever else there is: *omnis determinatio est negatio*, as Spinoza put it. Distinctions generate existence. Distinction itself is already existence. That is, an existent has no presuppositions or conditions except the distinction it draws when it comes forth from its ground or source. However, the ground itself does not exist, neither as existent nor as non-existent. The ground does not appear; it does not come forth. Therefore, the ground or source of existence must be the non-ground. In a philosophical sense, insofar as we can only speak about that which has arisen from the ground, it is the absolutely inaccessible, the unspeakable. But the non-ground—the ground taken on its own—is still not the ground or source of existence. In other words, this is not yet the Beginning. We have not been able yet to posit a Beginning. Paradoxically, however, this gives the impression that the ground is absent, for a ground that is not a ground of something is hardly a ground at all; the Beginning is absent. There is no Absolute. But yet there is.

Maybe we are simply too close to things and should try, philosophically, to stand outside the boundaries of existence in order to understand what is beyond existence. But how are we to stay outside the boundaries if there are no boundaries? It seems impossible to describe things that neither exist nor do not exist. It is as if it were a question of purely personal experience. And philosophers—like the German Idealists—who

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<sup>16</sup> See F.W.J. Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars*, in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F.W.J. Schelling*, trans. Thomas Pfau (New York: SUNY Press, 1994), 199–201; SW, I/7: 424–425; and for a discussion, Cem Kömürçü, *Selmsucht und Finsternis. Schellings Theorie des Sprachsubjekts* (Vienna: Passagen, 2011).

apparently had such experiences struggle to describe them. Their descriptions appear inadequate. There are no words to explain things that are less than nothing. How are we to explain to somebody that something (like ‘the highest point of our investigation’ mentioned above), whatever it is, neither exists nor does not exist? Indeed, Schelling himself must refer to the experience of indifference in ourselves to make the concept more palpable. Here, being indifferent here does not mean carelessness. Being indifferent rather means ‘to move back behind the reign of difference’ in which we are the determinate beings we are to the moment of ‘not-yet-different, not-yet-divergent’<sup>17</sup> (*TA*, 72). Such an indifference is only broken when we unconsciously choose the self that we are to become in a moment of decision, a decision whereby we come forth from our obscure ground as the specific person who we are, but a decision that remains ever elusive to our self-conscious awareness because it is prior to it.

In a way similar to how this psychological indifference works, metaphysical indifference is Schelling’s idea of the Absolute. It is the non-existing point from which difference is generated. It is the ground that is prior to everything that exists, even if it is, strictly speaking, non-existing—‘although, presumably, such priority can be thought in terms neither of time nor causality nor of ontological eminence. What else can we call it, Schelling asks—(“[...] *wie können wir es anders nennen als den Urgrund oder vielmehr den Ungrund?*”), than the primal ground, or rather the non-ground—*den Ungrund?*’ (*TA*, 94). In Schelling’s *Treatise On Human Freedom*, ‘the primal, primordial, incipient, originary ground (*Urgrund*) and the non-ground (*Ungrund*) are brought into the closest possible proximity: only a single letter distinguishes them in German’ (*TA*, 94). Indeed, it is a simple ‘r’ that is replaced by a simple ‘n,’ but this seemingly anodyne replacement, the shift from *Urgrund* to *Ungrund*, is highly meaningful (*TA*, 94). It is less a distinction of letters than of prefixes: whereas ‘ur-’ refers to an *arche* or primordial origin, that is, an existing source or starting point, ‘un-’ is a prefix of negation, which here denies any notion of ground. The non-ground—which Heidegger, in a very Schellingian move calls ‘the ground of ground [*Grund des*

<sup>17</sup> David F. Krell, *The Tragic Absolute: German Idealism and the Languishing of God* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *TA*] (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 72.

*Grundes*]<sup>18</sup> in his famous essay *Vom Wesen des Grundes* (*On the Essence of the Ground*)—is the origin/non-origin of all originary grounds and thus precedes every kind of opposition and all forms of identity, ‘all binary sets and straightforwardly oppositional units’ (*TA*, 94). It is neither dualism nor monism, but an indifferent duality (*TA*, 94–5). As Schelling writes: the non-ground can only be ‘the absolute indifference of both’ (*HF*, 68; *SW*, I/7: 406). It is neither a thing nor anything; it is a part of everything that exists, and it lies far behind the existence of the so-called world that Schelling also calls duality, absolute identity, or even spirit (*Geist*). The non-ground is not related to the world. On the contrary, it is simply indifferent to its dualism (of ground and existence); it ‘is a neither-nor, a neutral *ne-uter* from which all duality (and all eventual opposition) can proceed’ (*TA*, 95). The non-ground is pure indifference, and without indifference ‘there would be no two-ness of principles’ (*HF*, 69; *SW*, I/7: 407). The essence of the ground as well as the essence of that which exists can only be what precedes the ground: the non-ground.

So far, the Absolute has appeared to receive only a negative status. Nevertheless, this does not mean that it is negative. The Absolute as non-ground is neither positive nor negative. Rather, it is an indifferent and neutral essence:

it cannot be this in any other way than in so far as it diverges into two equally eternal beginnings, not that it can be both *simultaneously* [*zugleich*], but that it is in each *in the same way* [*gleicherweise*], thus in each the whole, or an essence all its own [*in jedem das Ganze oder ein einziges Wesen*]. (*HF*, 70; *SW*, I/7: 407; translation modified, emphasis added)

The ‘divergence,’ the crisis, of the indifferent Absolute ‘into two beginnings,’ into difference—which is an inexplicable moment, something that happened but for which there is no reason why it happened, and therefore happened by chance—‘leaves the wholeness and the indifferent ipseity of the absolute untouched’ (*TA*, 96). The Absolute is still *absolute* in the sense that it is detached from everything and not related to anything (*TA*, 96). The moment of the divergence, of the crisis, is the

<sup>18</sup> Heidegger, *Vom Wesen des Grundes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 53.

moment where the Absolute becomes *two* without giving up its indifferent *oneness*. And this is exactly why the non-ground does not exist; it is not related to anything—and without difference there is no life or existence. So what is the function of the Absolute, of the non-ground, if it does not exist? Why would it divide itself at all? This is Schelling's difficult answer:

But the non-ground divides itself into the two exactly equal beginnings, only so that the two, which could not exist simultaneously or be one in it as the non-ground, become one through love. That is, it divides itself only so that there may be life and love and personal existence. For love is neither in indifference nor where opposites are linked which require linkage for [their] Being, but rather (to repeat a phrase which has already been said) this is the secret of love, that it links such things of which each could exist for itself, yet does not and cannot exist without the other. (*HF*, 70; *SW*, I/7: 408)

If love is to be, even though there is no reason for *why* it should be, there must be such a two-ness of principles that makes up the world. We can simply give an account of *how*—that is, the division—the difference between ground and ground of existence came about. Love, like life and personal existence, needs divergence, the appearance of difference, beings that cannot be without the other. Love is the dualism or contradiction that the intellect is not able to resolve (*TA*, 97). But without the non-ground there would be no difference, and hence no life, because the Absolute is the non-existing, indifferent essence that is always already behind the contradiction of the ground of existence and existence. As that which endures behind the contradiction, it is that which can make them possible, can let them come together despite their difference because it itself is not phased by their conflict. Later in his *Ages of the World*, Schelling will call it past, the remote past. And this is exactly why the non-ground is love—the will of love, as Schelling explains—in the sense of the Spinozist *amor intellectualis*, as Wolfram Högerebe has shown.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Wolfram Högerebe, 'Imi Knoebel: "Amor Intellectualis" [hereinafter cited parenthetically as AI],' in *Imi Knoebel: Werke von 1966 bis 2006: Works from 1966–2006*, ed. Wilhelm-Hack-Museum Ludwigshafen (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2007), 83.

## 4 Expressing the Inexpressible

'*Amor intellectualis*.' This phrase, as is well known, comes from Baruch Spinoza's major work *Ethica ordine geometrico demonstrata*. However, *amor intellectualis* is not the complete phrase. It is *amor intellectualis dei*, which could be translated as the 'spiritual love of God' (*AI*, 83). God here has nothing to do with God in the religious sense. It is for this precise reason that Spinoza was, during his lifetime, often confronted with the accusation of atheism. For Spinoza—and this is a point upon which Schelling and Spinoza agree—God is just, as Högberg nicely puts it, 'the eternal and all-embracing substance that confronts us in everything that exists' (*AI*, 83), in everything that appears. Moreover: 'If we receive what confronts us in this known manner in the same way, we welcome it as the representative of everything eternal, that is *sub specie aeternitatis*' (*AI*, 83). In this way, love in the sense of *amor intellectualis* is not a physical love, but a kind of love that is completely independent of all knowledge or existence (*AI*, 83). For both Schelling and Spinoza, love is therefore the absolute and indifferent background of all knowledge and existence, which itself cannot be known and does not exist insofar as knowledge and existence are part of the domain of negation that is not, strictly speaking, to be found in the Schellingian Absolute or the Spinozist God.

Before proceeding, we must be careful that we understand this point concerning the background correctly. People often speak of 'background knowledge' in order to explain how we can know that something is the case. But, as some have argued, background knowledge might be a bad theory of knowledge or maybe not even amount to a theory of it at all. It simply means to know 'things you can be presumed to know already.'<sup>20</sup> On this picture, although you seem to know, in one respect, certain things tacitly, you nonetheless do feel the need for a deeper explanation. Consequently, there is a lack of proper explanation despite its implicit presence. Even if we assume that explanation by means of background knowledge is, in some respects, a good theory of knowledge, it is still not sufficient, for to explain something—whatever

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Williams, *Problems of Knowledge: A Critical Introduction into Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 133.



that something is—means to explain it ‘*in a particular way*.’<sup>21</sup> We never just explain something *tout court*: we explain something specific about it, by ‘focusing on some features and ignoring other aspects.’<sup>22</sup> What really counts as a good explanation therefore always depends on knowledge of a specific background context, a context that is different for each explanation. This does not mean that everything becomes ‘*relative* to a context of interest and presuppositions.’<sup>23</sup> It just means that there is no constant or stable background. Just as our perceptual background changes whenever we turn around, so too do the epistemological background contexts that inform our explanations continually change as we shift explanatory contexts. There is, consequently, nothing to know about the background if knowing is to explain something ‘*in a particular way*.’ More drastically, to explain it would even require that we move it into the foreground, whereby it would thus disappear *as background*.<sup>24</sup> However, the same must be the case with the non-ground as the Absolute that makes specific existents possible. How can we, therefore, come to express it at all? This is the precise moment where art, now bestowed a new dignity, enters the scene, where art meets philosophy, because at such crucial moments of the disappearance of explanation there can be no more reasoning. We are necessarily forced to a halt. There is no infinite reasoning for the philosopher (*AI*, 79). This is what Schelling risks to teach us, and why he remains relevant for us today.

When Schelling describes the Absolute as a nonexistent non-ground that, so to speak, always lies behind our backs, art can be a mirror for us to catch a glimpse of what is really going on where our philosophical sight, due to its limits, cannot reach. It is, therefore, no accident that his *Treatise On Human Freedom* is self-consciously largely poetic in composition: it is the only way we may hope to reach the ruleless, semantic ground that ever precedes world and language, for it functions as such a mirror. Although the mirror is a ‘means of visual representation,’ it is never ‘an image itself’ (*AI*, 81). Whereas an image does not depend on

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<sup>21</sup> Williams, *Problems of Knowledge*, 133.

<sup>22</sup> Williams, *Problems of Knowledge*, 133.

<sup>23</sup> Williams, *Problems of Knowledge*, 133.

<sup>24</sup> Williams, *Problems of Knowledge*, 132–134.

what there is and actually shows more, ‘a mirror is genuinely presentative and deictic’: ‘it only shows things that are present’ in the here and now (*AI*, 81). For instance, whenever I look into the mirror, I see the I that, having come forth, stands out from other things and other I’s in the world. Nonetheless, I can never truly grasp myself, the true ground of my personality, in the I that stares back at me. There is always more than the I to be seen and that demands further explanation: namely, what we may call the self, that from which the I comes to be and with which it is implicated. And this is why for the German Idealists mirrors are not to be used in the way ordinary mirrors are—that is, in a narcissistic way to see the I—as Wolfram Högbe has shown (*AI*, 81). For them, mirrors show more than that which Narcissus was looking for. Indeed, the very notion of German philosophy as ‘speculative’ derives from *speculum*, the Latin for ‘mirror.’ Speculative philosophy is thus not concerned with our existence or appearance (as Narcissus appears to himself in the reflection of the mirror), but instead with the background of existence or appearance, the background against which Narcissus can be seen in the first place. Self-knowledge may be, strictly speaking, impossible because the background from which the I emerges is constitutively out of reach for thought as its source, but the mirror paradoxically allows us, as it were, to see ‘behind our backs’ into that from which we have come forth, even if only for a moment.

Of course, if we ignore the skeptical arguments, we all know that we are, that we exist: we are all conscious of ourselves, self-conscious. We know *that* we are even if we still do not know *who* we are, that is, do not know the obscure ground from which we appear. There can be no knowledge of the self, no explanation of our depths. Samuel Coleridge, a disciple of Schelling’s from a distance, poignantly states this in one of his most famous philosophical poems, *Self-knowledge*<sup>25</sup>:

– E coelo descendit γνωθι σεαυτόν –  
 (It descended from heaven, *Know thyself*.)  
 Juvenal, xi.27.  
 γνωθι σεαυτόν ! – and is this the prime

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poems*, ed. J. Beer (London/New York: Everyman’s Library, 1974), 337.

And heaven-sprung adage of the olden time! –  
 Say, canst thou make thyself? – learn first that trade; –  
 Haply thou mayst know what thyself had made.  
 What hast thou, Man, that thou dar'st call thine own? –  
 What is there in thee, Man, that can be known? –  
 Dark fluxion, all unfixable by thought,  
 A phantom dim of past and future wrought,  
 Vain sister of the worm, – life, death, soul, clod –  
 Ignore thyself, and strive to know thy God!

The words 'Know thyself' were, as is well known, inscribed over the temple of Delphi. Coleridge's poem *Self-knowledge*, published in 1832, takes Juvenal's line as an epigraph: 'Ε coelo descendit γνῶθι σεαυτόν.' It can be translated as: 'It descended from heaven, *Know thyself*.' For Coleridge, in this context, this quotation implies more than a moral warning not to overstep humankind's boundaries. In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge proclaims that it concerns 'BEING altogether,' for the only way we can hope to know ourselves (which is in fact impossible) is to know our place in the scheme of things, where we came from:

The postulate of philosophy and at the same time the test of philosophic capacity, is no other than the heaven-descended KNOW THYSELF! [...] And this at once practically and speculatively. For as philosophy is neither a science of the reason or understanding only, nor merely a science of morals, but the science of BEING altogether, its primary ground can be neither merely speculative or merely practical, but both in one.<sup>26</sup>

The self whose impossible knowledge we seek must thus bear within itself an intimate relation to God or Being and be capable of containing the universe in its intuitions, its speculation, moral will, feeling, and knowledge. And the Coleridgean imperative—KNOW THYSELF!—could be explained as follows: 'Know all this that is within the self, the laws of nature and the sense of a creating intelligence, and know also even how

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<sup>26</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria: The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *BL*], ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 252.

the self knows and reflects on this knowledge in its consciousness of self' (BL, 252n1). And this is exactly the central point where Coleridge agrees with Schelling: 'All knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object and subject,' of nature and intelligence (BL, 252).

But is knowledge of the self actually impossible? Let's take the greatest philosopher of the subject, Fichte, as foil to test this Schellingian claim. Although Fichte, as a subjective idealist, attempts to solve the problem of knowledge in a way that appears to be, at first, radically different than that taken by Schelling, looking at his help us in appreciating the limits on philosophizing that Schelling himself exposes and the role he ascribes to art. Fichte, too, believes all knowledge is a coincidence of an object and subject. In Fichtean terms: all knowledge rests on the coincidence of the I and the Not-I. According to Fichte, this coincidence requires a *Grundsatz* (a foundational principle) that not only justifies knowledge, but cannot be itself justified: the I as Absolute I. As a *Grund-Satz* (a grounding tenet, a first clause), this foundational principle expresses the 'Act which does not and cannot appear among the empirical states of consciousness, but rather lies at the basis of all consciousness and alone makes it possible.'<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, this foundational principle should be, as a science, according to Fichte in his earlier treatise *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre* (*Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre oder der sogenannten Philosophie*), 'something unified and whole.'<sup>28</sup> Only this unified whole already creates the condition whereby something, whatever it is, appears, indeed really exists for us. If this unified whole exists, or the absolute proposition that exists with complete certainty, then we can assume with the highest possible probability that all the other propositions that stem from it are also certain. If this one proposition alone is certain, then the others are also certain;

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<sup>27</sup> J.G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1982), 93; GA, I/2: 255. Citations of Fichte provide the pagination of the English translation followed by that of the *J.G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 42 vols, ed. Erich Fuchs, Reinhard Lauth, and Hans Gliwitzky (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1964–2012). References to the Akademie edition are given by the abbreviation GA, division, volume and page number.

<sup>28</sup> J.G. Fichte, 'Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as Concept],' in *Early Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. by Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 102; GA, I/2: 114: 'Eins, ein Ganzes sein.')

if, on the other hand this, this one proposition is uncertain, then so are the others. Thus, all propositions obtain their certainty, their very reality, from this one proposition, which itself ‘cannot derive its certainty merely from its connection with the other propositions,’ according to Fichte, but ‘has to be certain and established in advance of all connection with other propositions’ (Concept, 103; *GA*, I/2: 114 ff.). Consequently, it is here a question of a proposition that, on the one hand, is attributed the strength and capacity to connect and unite something with something else, but, on the other hand, this one proposition seems to enjoy a total independence in its relationship to other propositions, which themselves in turn are reduced to its absolute certainty: ‘[i]f its certainty is independent then it remains certain even if the others are not’ (Concept, 103; *GA*, I/2: 115). As a result, the product of the *Grundsatz* is an accidental one: the propositions (the Not-I, the divisibility of the I and the Not-I, the theoretical and the practical foundations of knowledge) that are deduced from the absolute principle are indeed such as they are, but they could always have been different. This is not so, however, with the first principle. The latter is with absolute certainty what it is; it is *because* it is—without the possibility of being able to be different.

But this entails that, *for Fichte too, the foundational principle is also the Grund*. The word *Grund* is highly polysemic in German. Primarily, the *Grund* is more or less the foundation, base, or floor on which something is built. But it can also be the bottom of a vessel of liquid or of a body of water. In this context one can often hear: ‘he emptied his glass right to the *Grund* [bottom]’ or ‘The ship sunk to the *Grund* [bottom of the sea].’ And if things go awry, we can even say ‘*geht jemand sogar zugrunde* [they may die]’ or ‘*jemand oder etwas wird zugrunde gerichtet* [they or it will be wrecked].’ And lastly there is a further meaning of the word *Grund* that seems especially important in this context: the *Grund* as the innermost part of a thing, indeed a kind of an endpoint that, so to speak, explains everything; one goes ‘to the *Grund* of things,’ just as in English we may say ‘get to the bottom of things,’ because, as they say, everything has its own *Grund*. And all of these meanings are—perhaps even against himself—at play in Fichte’s account of the Absolute I. Thus, for Fichte the *Grund* is first and foremost the ground, the firmness on which the house of science rests: ‘But [as] one cannot live in a mere foundation [*Grund*],

which by itself provides protection against neither the willful attack of the enemy nor the unwilling attacks of the weather; so one adds side walls and a roof above them' (Concept, 104; *GA*, I/2: 116). The accidental putting together of individual parts in this way not only brings to light the image of the house; it also forms the whole of science, which specifically is not borne by the individual parts and propositions, but from the ground (*Grund*), from the foundational principle (*Grundsatz*) alone. In this way, science is borne by the foundational principle, which, as Fichte believes, exists with absolute certainty, unlike the other principles that were deduced from it. But this certainty is still a certainty that is true to its 'inner content,' a certainty *in itself*, which is however not *for us*, not determined by 'the *form* of science' whereby 'this inner content is to be communicated from the first principle to the other principles' (Concept, 105; *GA*, I/2: 117). For Fichte, the *Grundsatz* does indeed have a certain content that makes it the *Grundsatz* in the first place, but the method by which it is conveyed, the portrayal of its content, and with that itself, is *not transparent for us*, for transparency is a function of theoretical and practical knowledge, which itself presupposes that the unconditioned I has become conditioned. But there is absolutely no reason why it should give rise to something other than itself.

As such, just as much for Schelling as for Fichte, the ground of thinking has to be inexpressible in a philosophical science. It is impossible to know the self. The early *Wissenschaftslehre* fails and similarly so must all attempts to know the self. To put it differently, by expressing the matter in a more contemporary language: how can we think these sense structures, the very structures that even let us think, speak and act at all? How can we, therefore, think (the very basis of) thinking? This question must be the central axis of any metaphysics: the search for what is experienced as the lost source of thinking, the question of the foundation (*Grund*) of our knowledge and of our existence. Furthermore, the experience of the lost source of thinking is not just something that precedes philosophy inasmuch as the beginning of thought metaphysically precedes thinking itself. This experience has its own way of functioning: it also comes about internally within thinking itself in a specific manner. Thus, philosophy does not just express itself as the search for the lost origins of thinking, for the inscrutable, but also expresses itself as the actual self-destruction

of thinking in its inability to conceptually reach its own origins. When we question thinking and look for its source, we have already, in the act of trying to get to the bottom (*Grund*) of things even without being aware, killed or wrecked it. We bring it to its limits. This is the problem of ground. Nevertheless, the ambivalent relationship between the search to understand thinking and its consequent loss as it comes upon its own limits does not simply belong to the nature of philosophy. It is something truly human, an affair of the subject. For humanity is, in its being, completely philosophical. Humanity has to be so, for being human does not just mean that we exist in thinking and knowledge, but also at the same time that we surpass knowledge and thinking. We are always already beyond the borders of knowledge and thinking, beyond the given circumstances, whenever we stop to think about them because thinking about them necessarily leads us to the always hidden ground of thinking, to the very self-destruction of thought itself as it comes upon its own limits of understanding itself. Therefore, the *Grundsatz* is—as Heidegger would say—the ‘ground of the ground [*der Grund des Grundes*]<sup>29</sup> or, in Fichtean terminology, the knowledge of knowledge.

But none of this solves the fundamental existential question that remains caught up with these ambiguities: Who am I? What is it that lies behind my back? What is the ground or background from which I emerge as the person I am? It seems as if it were inexpressible. When I look into the mirror there is always already something or someone more than the I that stares back, something that supports the I without being in relation to it. But I cannot know what it is. Therefore, Coleridge’s and Schelling’s motto of life could be put as follows: don’t search for yourself within yourself, you won’t find it; the only way to find yourself is outside yourself (or, to put it emphatically by inverting Fichtean terminology: *I only find the I in the Not-I*). Consequently, there is something that represents myself and that expresses myself, but that is not me. What is it? ‘*Wie können wir es bezeichnen?*’ asks Schelling: ‘How can we call it?’ (*HF*, 68; *SW*, I/7: 406) What is the nonexistent outside of myself? What is the outside of the philosophizing I? Coleridge calls it *God* or *Being*, whereas Schelling describes it as the *inexpressible non-ground*. But for both the

<sup>29</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Vom Wesen des Grundes*, 53.

search for the self entails the loss of personal identity because it demonstrates how our identity relies on something that cannot become part of it. This is why art, as Coleridge and Schelling already saw, is so crucial: only it can help us here where philosophy can go no further, only it can help us think outside of dialectics.

Maybe it was Wittgenstein, whose whole philosophy was influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer, colleague of Hegel at the Humboldt University in Berlin, who tried to give the clearest answer to the question what the outside of the philosophizing I might be by stating that philosophy should be written as poetry: 'I think I summed up my attitude to philosophy when I said: philosophy ought really to be written as a form of poetic composition [*Ich glaube meine Stellung zur Philosophie dadurch zusammengefasst zu haben, indem ich sagte: Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur dichten*].'<sup>30</sup> This translation does not really express the sense of the original because there is no English word for '*dichten*.' The German word '*dichten*' is an intransitive verb that means, as David Schalkwyk remarks, 'writing poetry.'<sup>31</sup> Here, 'writing philosophy and writing poetry' build a kind of relationship: 'to philosophize is to poetize.'<sup>32</sup> Philosophers, as Wittgenstein suggests, should only write philosophy as if they were writing poetry. Especially the early Wittgenstein considered his own work as 'strictly philosophical' and 'literary' at the same time.<sup>33</sup> This is a clear consequence of the first work that brought him great fame: 'The concept of the inexpressible, particularly in the distinction between what can be "said" and what can be "shown", is perhaps the most fundamental thought of the *Tractatus*.'<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. Von Wright (in collaboration with Heikki Nyman), trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 24. For the German, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, in *Über Gewissheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), 483.

<sup>31</sup> David Schalkwyk, 'Wittgenstein's 'Imperfect Garden': The Ladders and Labyrinths of Philosophy as *Dichtung*,' in *The Literary Wittgenstein*, ed. John Gibson and Wolfgang Huebner (London/New York: Routledge, 2004), 56.

<sup>32</sup> Schalkwyk, 'Wittgenstein's 'Imperfect Garden,' 56.

<sup>33</sup> Wittgenstein, *Letter to Ludwig von Ficker*, quoted from Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 177.

<sup>34</sup> Schalkwyk, 'Wittgenstein's 'Imperfect Garden,' 57.



When I cannot *say* who I am, then the only option I have left is to *show* my self; when I do not know what lies behind my back, then I have to show it in a poetic or literary way. But this conclusion is not, as we have seen, unique to Wittgenstein. It was already inchoate in the metaphysics Schelling developed in his *Treatise On Human Freedom* (a point alone that shows how much his thinking resonates with us). By having recourse to the limits of thinking that he there explores, we can gain a greater appreciation of why, in many ways, poetry not only has become philosophical in our age, but must necessarily supplement philosophy. This is why poets sometimes are so philosophical, as for instance T.S. Eliot in his famous *Waste Land*.<sup>35</sup> Let's now listen to his words, which so poignantly demonstrate knowledge of the paradoxical background:

Who is the third who walks always beside you?  
 When I count, there are only you and I together  
 But when I look ahead up the white road  
 There is always another walking beside you  
 Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded  
 I do not know whether a man or a woman  
 –But who is that on the other side of you?

Who is that on the other side of you? Who is that on the other side of me? Is it the Not-I? Maybe. Who is the person who really says 'not-I'? Is it me, you, or someone else? No one knows;<sup>36</sup> it is something that is to be 'experienced'<sup>37</sup> by every single person. The Not-I does not explain to me what I ought to see; I have just to experience it with my own personal senses—with my *eyes*, *ears*, with my whole *body* and *soul*—and furthermore 'with my own history and culture.'<sup>38</sup> *The I is not by itself; it is (only in) the Not-I*. Art, and in particular poetry, can help us in experience it. And this finally leads us to what Arthur Rimbaud writes in one of his most famous letters

<sup>35</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and other Poems* (San Diego/New York/London: Harcourt, 1962), 43.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Schulz, 'Not I and yet I!', in *Imi Knoebel*, 87.

<sup>37</sup> Schulz, 'Not I and yet I!', 87.

<sup>38</sup> See Schulz, 'Not I and yet I!', 87.

to his teacher Georges Izambard: 'Il s'agit d'arriver à l'inconnu [...]—It is a question of reaching the unknown [...].'<sup>39</sup> Bestowing upon art the power to function as a mirror that reflects back to us this unknown, itself there becoming philosophical, Schelling gives us resources for rethinking the very relationship between philosophy and art, for coming to terms with the limits of thinking itself.

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<sup>39</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, *Œuvre Complètes*, ed. Antoine Adam (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1972), 249.

# 6

## Disorientation and Inferred Autonomy: Kant and Schelling on Torture, Global Contest, and Practical Messianism

F. Scott Scribner

### 1 Introduction

Paul Virilio suggests that global expansion has now turned to the industrialization of perception and information as an ‘endocolonization of a world without intimacy,’ in which ‘over-exposure’ on all fronts leads to a kind of generalized obscenity.<sup>1</sup> Now traditional culture, particularly in the Middle East, seems to have much the same view as Virilio. Their response to the obscene, to the profanation of the sacred by global capital, has been one of terror. And terrorism is now widely regarded as the binary or dialectic ‘other’ of global expansion. The West’s response, in turn, to this reaction against profanation is a further intensification of industrialized perception in the form of drones, the national security apparatus, and the invasiveness, in the extreme, of torture.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2000), 57.

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Virilio's critique of industrialized perception as an 'over-exposure' is, at essence, a critique of the 'disorientation' fomented not merely by globalization and global capital, but more fundamentally by the technology of speed. Speed disorients. Like Adorno's critique of the 'dialectic of Enlightenment' as culminating in Auschwitz, Virilio's own account of the disorienting effects of the technology of speed ought to be linked to its own kindred extreme: the willful and strategic technologies of disorientation undertaken by so-called 'scientific' torture in the name of the global war on terror. The over-exposure or hyper-stimulation generated by the technology of speed comes full circle toward its opposite to the extent that both extreme sensory isolation and over-exposure to stimuli each produce the similar effects of 'disorientation' and the ultimate breakdown of subjectivity.<sup>2</sup>

While we may seem far afield from post-Kantian German Idealism, it is important to remember that the root of globalization as contest and contestation resides not merely in the conflict between technological modernity and traditional or sacred culture, but also in that very same impasse that defined the scope of the project of German Idealism itself: the conflict between faith and reason.<sup>3</sup>

The idealist project is, no doubt, given contemporary currency by aligning its central task with the root paradox or contest at the heart of globalization. Yet confronting this legacy of Enlightenment modernity is such a vast, difficult, and overwhelming task as to be nearly meaningless without a more substantial focus.<sup>4</sup> Thus, while approaching the inherent contradictions of globalization through German Idealism's own approach to the Enlightenment has value, this chapter's focus presents an even more modest and narrow goal. I approach the two central techniques of modern scientific torture as paradigmatic, not only of 'the masses' generalized quotidian experience of globalization, but also as stemming

<sup>2</sup> Max Horkheimer and T.W. Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Genzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> The scope and task of post-Kantian German Idealism, of course, was first delimited by Kant's critical project: one that worked to curb the excesses of reason by determining what would count as legitimate objective knowledge, while relegating the rest to faith.

<sup>4</sup> The literature is indeed vast. In fact, much of Western philosophy since the Enlightenment can readily be understood as a reaction to it. See for instance, Robert B. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem* (London: Blackwell, 1991).

directly from the Enlightenment legacy of the conflict between faith and reason. These two torture techniques—extreme sensory deprivation and stress-positions—work to generate, on the one hand, ‘disorientation,’ and, on the other, what I name ‘inferred autonomy.’

In his 1786 essay ‘What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?,’ Kant in effect offers orientation as an analog for faith. I argue that Kant’s account of orientation as a mediating analog between faith and reason is key not only for understanding this tension within the Enlightenment, but perhaps also even more so for articulating globalization’s own internal contestation, particularly in view of faith as ‘orientation’ and in the simultaneous drive for ‘disorientation’ present in the technology of speed and at its most rarefied essence in the so-called ‘science of torture’ (as strategic ‘disorientation’). In fact, I argue that Kant’s account of orientation, as grounded in our own innate embodiment, is not truly an autonomous self-orientation, but remains too metaphysical, and it is precisely this metaphysics of orientation that torture seeks to uproot in all forms. This project seizes on the notion of ‘orientation’ because although Kant embraced it as a general ground for rational faith, the Enlightenment—despite its advances—is most commonly blamed for the loss of orientation, whether religious or cultural, in the language of alienation, meaninglessness, and anomie.

Global expansion, made possible by the technology of speed, disorients, and its disorientation is fundamentally temporal in nature. In his work *The Ages of the World* (1813), Schelling provides us with a temporal account of orientation; an orientation, I argue, made possible by a latent messianism inherent within the account of his ‘system of times.’<sup>5</sup> Now Derrida’s more contemporary analysis of globalization in view of the legacy of faith and reason reads global ‘contest’ as an immunological disorder, as a kind of political self-harm, with messianic potential. I argue that Schelling stands as a prescient precursor to Derrida’s account of messianism, but that he additionally offers resources for thinking about messianism both as an issue of orientation and for articulating this mes-

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<sup>5</sup> *The Ages of the World* (1813) [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *AW2*], trans. Judith Norman, in *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World*, by Slavoj Žižek and F.W.J. Schelling (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 121, 123.

sianic opening in terms of a ‘highest contest’—that is, for thinking about the metaphysical aspirations of ‘globalization’ itself from a material-technological vantage point that further vitalizes the importance of the broader idealist aspiration for a ‘physicalization of idealism.’<sup>6</sup>

## 2 Torture and the Metaphysics of Kantian (Dis)orientation

Since 9/11 torture has not only become a political common place in the West, but, more drastically, it has also been refined as a perverse kind of science that is less about wholesale bodily harm than sensory deprivation and disorientation, leading to an ultimate dissolution of subjectivity as the purest expression of deference to power. Torture is the West’s prime weapon against terrorism. While physical torture is medieval in inspiration, modern torture is explicitly psychological in its aim, and it was developed in the West explicitly as a science—in reaction to the cold war.<sup>7</sup> This so-called science led, as any science should, to ever-evolving experiments and torture field manuals that centered on two prime techniques: extreme sensory deprivation and self-inflicted pain (*QT*, 55). In view of the legacy of the Enlightenment, these translate into direct assaults on orientation and autonomy.

‘Self-inflicted pain’ is the term for a psychological torture technique in which prisoners, forced into a stress position, believe that they are responsible for their own pain (*QT*, 55). Yet what happens to the very idea of autonomy when it is merely an inferred autonomy, when it is staged in order to enact its own undoing? This self-destructive inferred autonomy whereby ‘victims are made to feel responsible for their own suffering’ inverts the traditional Enlightenment notions of autonomy and respon-

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<sup>6</sup> See note 17 below.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred W. McCoy, *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation, from the Cold War to the War on Terror* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *QT*] (New York: Henry Holt and Company LLC, 2006). See especially chapter 3. Torture was developed and refined over the last 50 years through scientific experiments undertaken by some of the twentieth century’s most eminent psychologists at leading university research centers. For instance, The Guardian’s investigation into these experiments from the 1950s reports that ‘early photographs show volunteers, goggled and muffled, looking eerily similar to prisoners arriving at Guantanamo’ (*QT*, 35).

sibility insofar as it leads to psychological ‘regression’ and inculcates ‘total dependence’ (*QT*, 51–2).

The second major technique, ‘extreme sensory deprivation,’ is fundamentally about disorientation. Under ‘isolating torture’ the subject strives, as one report puts it, to orient himself ‘to a world that makes sense,’ while the interrogator responds with ‘a confusion technique [...] designed not only to obliterate the familiar but to replace it with the weird’ (*QT*, 51). Virtually all sensory stimuli are eliminated in this radically controlled (non-)environment. Routines are eliminated. All sense of cadence, biorhythm, and time is disrupted (*QT*, 51). Any sense of spatial or temporal orientation is cut off.

Sensory deprivation is clearly a willful cause of sensory disorientation, but it must also be understood as an attempted *metaphysical* disorientation as well. One must not overlook that the fact that this process of torture as disorientation is brought to bear primarily on victims who uphold the ideals of traditional culture and its grounding orientation of earth and sky. Like a perverse metaphysical reeducation program, torture works to root-out orientation, whose fundamental image is the polestar. But the pole star is not the physical geography of the North Pole, but rather it is a journey towards the Cosmic North—the very axis of the universe. As the great French Sufi scholar Henry Corbin notes, the polestar is the axis of metaphysical geography; the quest for the mystical Orient is not achieved by traveling east: ‘This mystic Orient, the Orient-origin, is the heavenly pole, the point of orientation of the spiritual ascent. Acting as a magnet to draw beings [...] towards the palaces ablaze with immaterial matter. This is a region without any co-ordinates on our maps.’<sup>8</sup>

By eradicating the polestar, and more fundamentally the terraforming capacity of the imagination, this eradication of religious orientation would seem to be continuous with modernity’s Enlightenment legacy. It is worth noting, however, that Kant makes a unique place for ‘orientation’ within rational faith in his ‘What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?’ In 1786 Kant writes this essay as an intervention into a debate between Jacobi and Mendelssohn. He ultimately sides with Mendelssohn

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, trans. Nancy Pearson (Boston: Shambala Publishers, 1997), 11.

by seizing on his notion of 'orientation' and integrating it within his own systematic project of critique. Kant's broader goal is to both quell tendencies, like Jacobi's, to interpret faith as 'enthusiasm' and invoke 'orientation' as a kind of faith that makes the supersensible 'serviceable to the experiential use of reason.'<sup>9</sup> Not surprisingly, Kant seeks to subordinate faith within the broader architectonic of reason. This is a major step in the Enlightenment process of the secularization of faith. A question to which I will return is this: are there limits to which one can make faith 'serviceable to the experiential use of reason'?

Much in line with Kant's larger project of critique in which he limits the legitimate use of reason to knowledge and relegates the rest to faith, Kant essentially defines orientation as a 'need of reason' that has only a 'subjective ground' and thus understands it as a kind of 'enlightened' or secularized faith (OT, 10; *Ak.*, 8: 137). In fact, he explicitly aligns orientation with rational faith. He writes: '[a] pure rational faith is therefore the signpost or compass by means of which this speculative thinker orients himself in his rational excursions into the field of supersensible objects' (OT, 14; *Ak.*, 8: 142). Yet what then is orientation other than faith, or how then does orientation help us understand the ground of the Kantian reformulation of faith?

Kant begins by explaining that this 'felt *need* of reason' is 'not *cognition*,' but rather 'insight into its lack and through the *drive for cognition* it effects the feeling of need' (OT, 12, 12n; *Ak.*, 8: 139, 139n). This felt need of reason has no objective justification, but rather arises as a lack, as a kind of failed cognition. And, like feeling around in the dark, whether metaphysical darkness or a more concrete groping in a dark room, we are ultimately thrown-back upon ourselves. While Kant's example of operating in the dark, as a low sensory environment, is used to clarify his point that orientation grounds itself in the subjective self-differentiation of right and left, torture's aim will be to eradicate even this ground. Kant's

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<sup>9</sup>Immanuel Kant, 'What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking? [hereinafter cited parenthetically as OT],' in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 10; *Ak.*, 7: 137. Citations of Kant provide the pagination of the English translation followed by that of the *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussischen (later Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols (Berlin: Georg Reimer [later Walter de Gruyter], 1900-). References to the Akademie edition are given by the abbreviation *Ak.*, volume and page number.



trajectory is to move from a spatial analogy to ‘thinking in general,’ from body to world.

Kant defines orientation spatially as our bodies’ situatedness within the world and its directional horizon (OT, 8; *Ak.*, 8: 134). In view of our contemporary example of torture, it is worth noting that Kant too sees the link between physical situatedness and metaphysical orientation. He explains that ‘I orient myself *geographically* only through a *subjective* ground of differentiation’ (OT, 9; *Ak.*, 8: 135). The need for faith may arise from reason’s ‘felt need’ as lack of or failed cognition, but one is ultimately thrown back upon one’s own bodily self-differentiation. While one can appreciate the Enlightenment ideal autonomy in which one is thrown back upon oneself and must depend upon oneself, the lead phrase ‘I orient myself *geographically* [...]’ already betrays the limitation or impossibility of this project, because even self-differentiation harbors within it a metaphysical residue. He seems to forget that all ‘geography’ ‘orients,’ not on the order of some kind of physical realism, but because even self-differentiation always already requires a metaphysical horizon or world in which there are no ‘objective’ heavens apart from the classic religious icon of orientation: namely, the polestar.

As I have already suggested, despite its Enlightenment aspirations, the Kantian account of orientation remains powerfully metaphysical not simply because it provides an analogical touchstone for justifying a subjectively legitimate metaphysical orientation or faith, but because the very notion of innate bodily orientation already presumes a phenomenologically styled ‘lived-body’ that operates not merely in abstract space, but precisely in the co-constituting dynamic with a ‘lived-world.’ Self-orientation is always already innately metaphysical.

Thus, as a technique for total ‘disorientation,’ contemporary so-called ‘scientific’ torture practices take the Kantian example of the ‘dark room’ to its farthest logical extreme through total sensory deprivation. Their goal is not merely to undermine a person’s sacred worldview, but—fundamentally—to destroy the innate metaphysical orientation of the body itself, to cut all co-constituting ties between the lived body and its world. In this sense, the disorienting effects of contemporary torture techniques are like the distilled essence of not simply globalization, but also the technology of speed and its own eradication of metaphysics understood as

the uprooting of any and all spatial and temporal orientation. In brief, the speed and the technology of torture beat Kant at his own game—at least in regard to the radical secularization, and ultimate elimination, of faith.

Bodily (self-)orientation, then, is not only the ground of faith; it is fundamentally the physical analog and axis of metaphysics itself and the frontline for modernity in its battle against it. As odd, hyperbolic, counterintuitive, or perverse as it may sound, in regard to eliminating the body's own innate metaphysics of faith (as orientation), Western contemporary practices of torture stand as direct heirs to Enlightenment modernity. After all, although Kant would certainly object to torture in any form, pushing the letter beyond the spirit, one nevertheless has to wonder whether our current perverse legacy of the Enlightenment would see the science of strategic disorientation as yet part of the continuing and ever intensifying effort to make faith 'serviceable to the experiential use of reason.'

### 3 Schelling on Time, Orientation, and Messianism

Like all technologies of speed, global expansion too disorients. The techniques and technologies of torture are merely an extreme instance of this more general phenomenon. Within the register of speed, space is reduced to time such that today's global malaise is primarily one of temporal disorientation. It is for this reason that we turn to Schelling's account of orientation within his broader articulation of 'the complete system of times,' the contours of which may provide us with resources for how to battle this malaise.

In the first book of Schelling's *Ages of the World* (1813), he defines philosophy as 'science [*Wissenschaft*],' as a fundamental history whose task is primarily one of temporal orientation (AW2, 114). Like Kant's account of the innate spatial orientation of our lived body as an analogy for establishing our bearings beyond the legitimate use of reason, so too will Schelling reference an autochthonous touch-stone of temporal orientation, one he identifies with a 'co-science/con-consciousness [*Mitt-Wissenschaft*] of creation' (AW2, 114). Philosophy as science, as *Wissenschaft*, is history

(*AW2*, 113–115), but not as a mere profane history that busies itself with the confusions of the mere flow of time and the pabulum of so-called truth. Schelling emphatically asks, ‘What would history be if an inner sense did not come to its aid?’ (*AW2*, 116). True history as a philosophical *Wissenschaft* is not a pedestrian or profane recounting of events, a knowing ‘all about what happened;’ rather it is primarily a temporal caesura, a fundamental axis that orients us (*AW2*, 116). This caesura is an opening of time onto eternity, a ‘reduction’ of time ‘to its innermost beginning’ (*AW2*, 117). Yet how, for Schelling, does one gain access to this touchstone of temporal orientation? Retracing the inward path to one’s ‘*Mitt-Wissenschaft* of creation’ is to re-ignite one’s own inner essence that is one with the creative impulse itself, so that we become a ‘living witness’ to this essence and truth (*AW2*, 116).

Schelling rails against the mechanistic view of time as a casually determined flow of the past, present, and future (*AW*, 120). And it is against this view that he posits a more ‘authentic’ order of time. He writes that ‘[o]nly the man who has the strength to rise above himself is able to create a true past, present, and future’ (*AW2*, 120). Schelling posits a completely new order of authentic times—in particular, an ‘authentic past’ and ‘authentic future’ that stands wholly outside of the experienceable world (*AW2*, 121). For Schelling, the past is ‘what came before the world [*vorweltliche*]’ in the same way that the true future is ‘what will come after after the world [*nachweltliche*]’ (*AW2*, 121).

Our capacity to orient ourselves toward an authentic past and future arises not only from our innate sense of the temporal contradiction of striving and resistance, the very ‘venom of life,’ but also from our awareness of an eternity that subtends it (*AW2*, 124). Moreover, quite paradoxically, this ground of time in being *seeks us* as a way to foment its own unfolding (*AW2*, 123–124). This secret or authentic system of temporality is certainly a profound and necessary kind of orientation; yet it is one that also makes clear the manner in which any authentic orientation also exhibits characteristics of a kind of messianism.

Now most recently the discourse of messianism has been brought to currency through Derrida’s reformulation of Walter Benjamin’s own account of it. Benjamin criticizes historicism’s causal, linear model of time as ‘empty,’ ‘homogenous,’ and ‘additive’ and offers a reformulated

account of messianism as a creative, constructive principle—as a remedy to that additive notion of time as human progress.<sup>10</sup> For Benjamin, messianic cessation is a temporal caesura, an opening of Now-time (*Jetztzeit*) that short-circuits both causality and the notion of progress because it embraces a present simultaneously ‘shot-through with chips’ of an infinitely reformulable past that is the hallmark of messianic time.<sup>11</sup> It is not linear temporal progress, but rather this temporal constellation, which holds out the possibility of redemption. A constellation opposes linear time because it allows for the simultaneity of multiple times.

Benjamin and Derrida are linked in their refusal to give specific content to this messianic promise. Yet while messianism is, for Benjamin, about redeeming an ever-reconfigurable past, the promise of messianism for Derrida is precisely a promise: it is constitutively futural.<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that both Benjamin and Derrida reformulate messianism in a way that focuses primarily on liminal openings that reveal themselves in the simultaneity of co-present times. It is for this reason that Benjamin’s work can be understood as a ‘weak messianism’ and Derrida’s as a ‘messianism without messianism.’<sup>13</sup> Whether it is the language of Benjamin’s *Jetztzeit* or Derrida’s account of ‘spectral hauntings,’ the emphasis is not on the content of any actualized messiah, but rather on a constitutive temporal structure, a redemptive expectation that gives orientation, hope, and meaning.

On this definition, I would argue that Schelling too, particularly in *The Ages of the World*, exhibits a kind of latent messianism constitutive of his account of time. In fact, I would argue that it is this latent messianism that is key to our earlier discussion of the temporality of

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History,’ in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 255–257.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History,’ 263.

<sup>12</sup> Derrida writes: ‘to affirm the coming of this event, its future-to-come [...] all this can be thought [...] only in a dis-located time of the present, at the joining of the randomly dis-jointed time’ (*Specters of Marx: the State of Debt, and the Work of Mourning & the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf [New York: Routledge, 1994], 19–20). For Derrida on messianism, see *Specters of Marx* and the essay ‘Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of Religion at the Limits of Reason Alone [hereinafter cited parenthetically as FK],’ trans. Samuel Weber, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 43–101.

<sup>13</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 74.

orientation. Like Benjamin and Derrida, Schelling's latent temporal messianism is also without content: There is no literal coming savior, but rather this latent messianism is structurally constitutive of his account of time itself in which the authentic present is simultaneously shot through with both an authentic past and an authentic future. One's temporal trajectory is given orientation precisely in this simultaneously infinite past and infinite future.

Anticipating Benjamin, Schelling dismisses the causal account of time. He writes: '[i]f [...] the world were a chain of causes and effects that ran backwards and forwards to infinity, then there would in truth be neither past nor future' (AW2, 120). The infinite past of eternity appears as an 'instant' in each new act of generation, entering 'the present time as an alienated (re)appearance' (AW2, 162). Yet if the present is shot through with an infinite past, Schelling queries how it is possible for two times to exist in simultaneity. He explains:

different moments of the same time, regarded as such, cannot be simultaneous. But regarded as different times, they can be '*at the same time*'. Indeed, they are necessarily '*at the same time*'. The past clearly cannot be present at the same time as the present; but as past it is certainly simultaneous with the present, and it is easy to see that the same holds true of the future (AW2, 173–174).

Again, it is important to remember that these times are not causally linked. Rather, the authentic past and authentic future are of a radically different order than the present. One's proper orientation to 'this complete system of times,' what I have named a latent temporal messianism, is what defines an 'authentic present.' Reminiscent of Hölderlin's own account in *The Death of Empedocles* of accessing eternity by means of the greatest contradiction, Schelling too writes: '[T]hus, only contradiction at the highest grade of increase is able to break open eternity and disclose the complete system of times. This is what would have to occur if a decision were to be made. But the How? is not yet explained' (AW2, 174). Perhaps what is required is a kind of practical messianism.

## 4 On Contradiction and Practical Messianism

Derrida articulates the contest of contemporary global terrorism as an autoimmune disorder, as a conflict that is always interior and remains aligned with the conflict of faith and knowledge (FK, 80n27). It is worth noting that Schelling's own account of a latent temporal messianism arising out of 'the greatest contradiction' would seem to subtend the 'general logic' of Derrida's more contemporary analysis of the messianic potentialities of auto-immunological contest at the heart of globalization. For Derrida, terrorism is always something internal, interior, a repressed other that—neglected—emerges like the body's own immunological disorder in which it attacks itself (FK, 80n27). This certainly plays itself out most directly in globalization's self-generating contest between terror and torture, but also in its conceptual roots in faith and knowledge, and through Schelling's suggestion that the messianic caesura appears precisely at this moment of highest contradiction.

In fact, these opposites are bound to such a degree that Derrida will make the striking assertion that 'technology is the possibility of faith' (FK, 83). Yet it is a 'chance,' he adds, that 'entails the greatest risk' (FK, 83). This auto-immunological disorder is one with the very site of messianic opening. Thus, for Derrida, as well as for Schelling, the courage to hold forth the radical contradiction of opposites defines the very schema of the liminal opening of a kind of messianism. Derrida identifies the 'enemy of life which gives life,' 'the tele-technoscientific machine' in terms of a strange (*unheimlich*) binding 'to the very source and resource of the religious' (FK, 84). In view of this strange 'binding,' it's worth noting that techniques of extreme isolation in modern scientific torture seem much in line with religious ascetic practices in terms of both method and outcome—namely, they lead to a 'disintegration of the subject's identity' (QT, 58). From flagellation to self-mutilation, to castration, to self-isolation and other forms of extreme asceticism, religion and torture have had a long intertwined history.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ariel Gluckman, *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

The thought of practical messianism indeed must wager ‘the greatest risk.’ What then if, despite itself, and despite all intended aims, the West’s torture program were actually a medium for religious experience? Such an unimaginable and *unheimlich* thought is precisely the site of this ‘greatest danger.’ Of course, the horrors of torture are manifold. And while at first glance an obvious key difference turns on autonomy, on one’s own free decision to undertake an action, things are never so simple. After all, what are we to make of the fact that a central element of modern torture is what I call an ‘inferred’ autonomy, a state in which the prisoner is led to believe their pain is self-inflicted? The illusion of autonomy is one of ‘the foundations of the global system of auto-regulation.’<sup>15</sup> The point here is certainly not to validate the horror of torture, nor simply to elide the two, but rather enact a kind of practical messianism whereby a rupture in the thought-path of temporal consciousness occurs through holding two seeming contradictory, and thus impossible, notions together.<sup>16</sup>

Technology stands as the possibility of faith in two related senses. The first is temporal. It is *futur antérieur* or future perfect tense. Technology is the condition of possibility of faith; it frees us from the sheer causality of nature and mere biological life in order to aspire to a life beyond life—as faith, religion, messianism (FK, 87). But the strange temporality is one where, in standing as a condition of possibility of faith, technology simultaneously posits its resultant consequence (religion)—but as its cause. Thus, the metaphysical desire that drives technology is not a reiteration, not a technology completing metaphysics, but perhaps the inverse.

While for Derrida, the point is that the temporal priority is always undecidable—origins are originally double, such that the embrace of faith and knowledge itself holds out the possibility for messianic opening—Schelling would seem to incline towards a priority of the technological or what we may call a ‘physicalization of idealism.’<sup>17</sup> Schelling too

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the End of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2013), 46.

<sup>16</sup> A detailed analysis of the messianic potentiality of non-dialectical contradiction from Hegel, through Schelling, Benjamin and Derrida would no doubt be instructive, but unfortunately stands well beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>17</sup> While it was Fichte who first invoked the phrase ‘*Physicirung des Idealismus*’ in his *Tagebuch über den animalischen Magnetismus* in his search for a material proof of idealism, the search for this kind

begins with matter, charging those who ‘lack humility’ and ‘slander’ it as impatient, rushing to ‘highest concepts’ rather than starting with the ‘natural beginning of life’ (AW2, 148). For Schelling, matter begets spirit, much the same way, for Derrida, the material practices of technology are inseparable from the manifestation of religion. Following a loose narrative of ‘alchemy,’ Schelling identifies a ‘point of transformation’ whereby the ‘spark’ of spirit first appears (AW2, 151). Moreover, this ‘point of transformation’ marks the ‘highest transformation of human corporality’ as spiritual and for Schelling stands as yet another physical proof of spirit or idealism. His talk of ‘the incorporeal essence’ as ‘sensibly visible’ (AW2, 152) is what is called ‘essentification’—an expression borrowed from Oetinger’s own physical proof of idealism from his famed ‘balm-leaf experiment.’<sup>18</sup>

Schelling’s ‘complete system of times’ operates as a double. Against the willful forces of disorientation embodied in the Enlightenment legacy of globalization, in both the technology of speed and at its extreme the sensory deprivation techniques of torture, he offers a latent messianism that orients by means of the double structure constitutive of his system of times. Schelling confesses that the practical application or means to catalyze this messianism are difficult to parse, but he suggests this temporal caesura arises from the ‘highest contradiction’—whereby we are allowed to think the contestation of globalization itself as terror and torture in terms of the Enlightenment legacy of faith and reason, and, in turn—via Derrida—as faith and technology. While the serious embrace of this contradiction, like the cognitive short-circuit of a Zen koan, might offer a kind of blank-slate messianic opening, Schelling—in part—accepts a priority of the material-technological on pragmatic grounds.<sup>19</sup> Within the

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material analog was widespread. This is clear from Schelling’s own interest in the infamous ‘balm-leaf experiment,’ in which it was rumored that Oetinger was able to materially extract the essence or spirit of the plant. For more on Schelling and this experiment, see: *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, II/4, ed. Karl Friedrich August Schelling (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J. G. Cotta, 1856–61), 207. For more on Fichte’s search for a material proof for idealism, see my work: *Matters of Spirit: J.G. Fichte and the Technological Imagination* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> See above footnote.

<sup>19</sup> In line with this materialist reading of Schelling that aligns the material and the technological, it is worth noting that he also makes reference to the ‘technicism of nature’ (AW2, 162).



system of times, Schelling would seem to embrace Derrida's initial assertion that technology precedes faith, that matter is the very basis of metaphysics, that idealism is equally—if not fundamentally—a materialism.

If technology precedes faith—and thus gives form and structure to its cartography—and simultaneously if the site of highest contradiction is one with the fissure of messianic opening, how are we to think faith today as part and parcel of this contestation, as other than torture itself, especially given our contemporary technological practices of disorientation through torture? Kant's own attempt to secularize faith's orientation, to make it serviceable to reason, opens up the possibility of its complete obliteration by reason, by technology. Kant does not go far enough. For those who are frustrated by the wrestling with terms and conceptual contradiction, it is important to recognize, as Schelling did, that 'intermediacy concepts are precisely the most important' (*AW2*, 150). The horizon of this impossible thought of faith as arising from the technologies of torture, as part of globalization's perverse Enlightenment legacy, is not strictly limited to 'actual' torture, but applies to the broader disorientation effected by the speed of technology itself, which engages in a disorientation on all fronts that is just as real.

The other site of contestation for scientific torture that has been generalized throughout our quotidian experience of globalization is what we have named inferred autonomy: the acceptance of responsibility for self-inflicted pain we did not cause. The so-called science of torture is a revealing instance of Adorno's culmination of the 'dialectic of Enlightenment' in that it explicitly aspires to root out metaphysical orientation in its innate embodied form and in its re-staging of autonomy, as an inferred autonomy only, a mocking of the original Enlightenment ideal as an impossibility that somehow seems to give weight to the worldview of orientation—to which it simultaneously lays waste. How, then, should one approach the undecideability of 'inferred autonomy,' a choice that is not a choice, other than as part of this broader circuit, as yet another iteration of the ultimate impossibility and 'highest contest' of technology and faith, faith and reason, at the heart of globalization? It is a dangerous yet absolutely necessary solicitation to embrace this ultimate contest as a horror from which we ought not look away, and it is none other than an invitation to practical messianism, the very axis of orientation itself.

# 7

## The Beech and the Palm Tree: Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* as a Project of Decolonization

Jean-Christophe Goddard

### 1 Two Humanities: Natives and Settlers

At the beginning of the Seventh Address to the German nation, Fichte says something rather peculiar that, provided one takes it seriously, sheds new light on his entire body of work. It is here a question, once again, of the ontological difference that underlines the two scientific points of view of dogmatism and transcendentalism.<sup>1</sup> These two points of view are by no means two possible ways of seeing for *one* single being, freely

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<sup>1</sup> See J.G. Fichte, 'First Introduction to the Science of Knowledge,' in *Science of Knowledge* [herein-after cited parenthetically as *WL-1794*], ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1982), 8 ff. *GA*, I/4: 188 ff. Citations of Fichte provide the pagination of the English translation, where possible, followed by that of the *J.G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 42 vols, ed. Erich Fuchs, Reinhard Lauth, and Hans Gliwitzky (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1964–2012). References to the *Akademie* edition are given by the abbreviation *GA*, division, volume and page number.

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available to it, but rather two separate lives, two kinds of vision corresponding to *two*, so to speak, specifically distinct beings. They are two perspectives that are not to be taken in the perspectivist-relativist sense of a variety of views taken on the same thing, but, instead, in the sense of two kinds of vision, two *productions* of knowledge or consciousness<sup>2</sup> that entail a difference in the things we can see, such that one can change one's perspective, see what the other sees, only on the condition that one transforms oneself *into the other, becomes the other* oneself—not a different being within a *common* humanity, but, on the contrary, a being of a *completely different* humanity. Fichte's statement in the Seventh Address that '[t]o see differently, you would first have to become different from what you are [*Solltest du anders sehen, so müsstest du erst anders werden*]'<sup>3</sup> can thus only be understood by linking it to the chain of statements that, throughout his work, set two humanities—ancient and modern, proprietor and non-proprietor, and so on—against one another, not in terms of a historical division or as a social division, but in terms of a difference of being.

The problem that arises and that the *Wissenschaftslehre* must solve as a practice of initiation (*Anweisung*) into a new life (transcendental philosophy)<sup>4</sup> is therefore a problem of transformation, of becoming, that of a passage from one way of seeing to a different one as the way of seeing of a different species, of a different being. The difficulty that the *Wissenschaftslehrer* takes upon him or herself, since he or she must conduct this initiation, will be thus to find some path of real continuity between these two polarized and non-homologous terms that refer to two humanities, to *practically* depolarize their *ontological* polarity. Transcendental philosophy is consequently in no way, as one believed—and as one still

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<sup>2</sup> Literally, '*Wissenschaft*' suggests a 'production (*schaffen*)' of 'knowledge (*Wissen*),' the latter of which presupposes consciousness. In this sense, we could translate '*Wissenschaftslehre*' as a 'teaching (*Lehre*)' that deals with the 'production of knowledge and consciousness,' the two fundamental kinds of which are those of dogmatism and transcendental philosophy.

<sup>3</sup> J.G. Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *AGN*], trans. Gregory Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 86; *GA*, I/10: 184.

<sup>4</sup> This is, of course, a play on Fichte's *Die Anweisung zum seeligen Leben oder auch die Religionslehre*, translated into English as *The Way Towards the Blessed Life; or, the Doctrine of Religion*, in *The Popular Works of Johann Gottlieb*, trans. William Smith, ed., and with an introduction by Daniel Breazeale (Bristol, England: Thoemes Press, 1999 [originally published between 1848 and 1889]).

believes—a doctrine whose value is to be measured in terms of the expectations of speculative reason; it is inseparable from this experience of depolarization and transformation that has very little to do with speculation and requires other powers.

At the beginning of the Seventh Address to the German nation, such an anthropo-ontological difference sets the inner being of ‘the foreign [*Ausland*]’ and that of ‘the original people [*Urvolk*]’ against one another (AGN, 86; GA, I/10: 183), two terms that have to be translated literally if one is to avoid unnecessary ideological complications. ‘*Ausland*’ designates that which is located outside of the country, while ‘*Urvolk*’ the native, aboriginal people. The structure of the polarity arises in the very event of the invasion of a territory by an outside power and the subjugation of the natives by the invaders. It is originally the expression of a relationship of domination.

But, in addition, this anthropo-ontological difference has another crucial dimension. The invaders, the *Ausländer*, because they come from outside the *Land* to conquer it, are also ‘the non-originality [*Nichtürsprunglichkeit*],’ the negation, of the aboriginal principle (AGN, 86; GA, I/10: 183–184): They are in essence non-native, not in the sense of coming from elsewhere, of having a different geographical origin, but because they are ontologically foreign to all genesis, all mediation—are, to use a Fichtean lexeme, without ‘through (*Durch*).’ Invaders always come from nowhere and make void, by the brutal fact of their act of invasion, the origins, the primitive or native beginnings, of a people, for invaders only have a factual existence. In contrast, ‘*Urvolk*’ designates the people, all peoples, to the extent that to be a people, they must necessarily be primitive, native, originary—in the sense that their being is not only ‘factual’ or ‘historical,’ as is that of a colonial or imperial army of conquest, a state administration, and so on. It is also ‘genetic,’ meaning it is entirely constituted by the symbolic mediations through which a people make an image of themselves and thereby form themselves (*bildet sich*), an activity that always occurs by and for itself (the Fichtean notion of ‘genesis’ being thus emptied of all genealogical meaning).

For polar terms are not symmetrical: If the *Ausland* comes to be through the crossing of an external border by an imperial army, the *Urvolk*, the aboriginal people, are not understood in relation to an external border, but

instead in relation to an 'internal' one. If the aboriginal people are indeed the first inhabitants, then it is not in the sense that their ancestors were the first to occupy the place circumscribed by its natural borders. 'First' rather describes how they inhabit the place—and 'inhabit' does not mean 'occupy.' The act of inhabiting comes first, and the *Urvolk* are a first people in the sense that the place, the territory that forms its nation, is itself engendered by inhabiting it. This inhabiting, contrary to state military occupation, which appropriates a natural area by violating an external border, is not extensive. It is intensive. It is not enough to say that the internal border is linguistic, spiritual, and moral; one must add, as succinctly put by Étienne Balibar, that the original life of the people—their linguistic, spiritual, and moral life—is 'essentially the movement of a continuous formation (*Bildung*), a practical activity (*Tätigkeit*), of a surpassing of all that is given, and determined as given (*Etwas*).' It is therefore a permanent internal revolution.<sup>5</sup>

It is also not enough to say that the notion of *Urvolk* is thus stripped of all naturalist content. More radically, we must underline that it breaks, purely and simply, with modern, naturalist ontology insofar as the latter defines itself by the opposition between a general physical exteriority and the plurality of psychic interiorities: The polarity of the external border and internal border itself has literally nothing to do with such a split between the physical and the psychic. The interiority of the aboriginal people is not an intimacy inviolable by the armed force of conquerors because it is located beyond physical existence, on a plane of being where material violence cannot take grip. Its interiority, its '*in sich*,' is not to be understood as a withdrawal into the self or a surpassing of mundane existence, but conversely as a practical commitment, as an affirmation of the primacy of practical existence in this world. The interiority of the aboriginal people is a continual self-formation; it is one with its completely primitive, genetic being. And this self-formation is inseparable from its practical activity, that is to say, its practices. One could describe these as 'immaterial' only to the extent that these practices constitute

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<sup>5</sup> Étienne Balibar, 'Fichte et la frontière intérieure. À propos des *Discours à la nation allemande*,' in 'Philosophie et politique en Allemagne (XVIIIe–XXe siècles),' Special Issue, *Cahiers de Frontenay* 58–59 (1990): 75.

what is called ‘intangible cultural heritage,’ meaning a living symbolic culture in perpetual transformation and that thus does not allow itself to become fixed and handed down in definite, arrested forms; as a set of immaterial, symbolic practices, aboriginal interiority realizes in each of its acts the immediate unity of the physical and the psychic.

## 2 The *Wissenschaftslehre* is Not a Book

From this point of view, it is remarkable and perfectly consistent that the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the teaching for life that Fichte provided to philosophers, explicitly refuses to be a ‘book.’ Its *oral* transmission—and thus *listening* to it for length of the lecture—is even the *conditio sine qua non* for understanding it and for its effectiveness. Whether ‘friend or foe,’ if the writer-philosophers who have written on the *Wissenschaftslehre* have failed to ascend to the concept that Fichte has of it, then it is precisely because they are *writers* and *wrote* about it.<sup>6</sup> Only the audience of the *Wissenschaftslehre* insofar as ‘they have not written [*die aber nicht geschrieben*],’ are capable, according to Fichte, of accessing not only the concept that he himself has thereof, but also a concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre* ‘higher’ than his own (WL-1804, 106; GA, II/8: 202/203; translation mine). This is a declaration worth being taken seriously by Fichte studies insofar as it forces us to reconsider the status of the text on which the learned commentary of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is based: The latter is only a written record of an oral performance—a *necessarily* oral performance—which cannot live on in a text, but only in its oral reprise by the *Wissenschaftslehrer* or by his or her audience.

This illuminates the series of constant repetitions from year to year—sometimes multiple times per year—of Fichte’s exposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. This series presents us not so much with constant

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<sup>6</sup>J.G. Fichte, *Science of Knowing: J.G. Fichte’s 1804 Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as WL-1804], trans. Walter E. Wright (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), 106; GA, II/8: 202/203. The GA version contains the two known versions of second series of these lectures—the one published by I.H. Fichte and a copy made in an unidentified hand—printed on facing pages to aid a comparison, given the lack of Fichte’s own manuscript (hence, the double pagination).

reworkings of the same content—successive approximations, all more or less complete, of one single project—as with the continuous practice of an oral work that is essentially unstable, imperfect, and unfinished, because it precisely challenges the stability and completion expected by doctrinal science, which is anxious to provide a historical representation, entirely communicable ‘by writing [*schriftlich*]’ (*WL-1804*, 106; *GA*, II/8: 202/203; translation mine), of the event of thinking that is philosophical thinking for the benefit of academic institutions.

As a general rule, to speak properly about Fichte, one should abandon all of the false problems artificially constructed by erudite criticism for the purpose of giving the work a historical-factual dimension: that of the unity of the theory (or not), of its evolution or of its sudden turns during different sequences of its production (the Jena period, intermediate period, late period), that of its affiliation with Kantian transcendentalism or Rhine mysticism, that of belonging to the revolutionary camp or reactionary camp, and so on. The *Wissenschaftslehre* is without history. Reduced to its own dimension of immaterial practice—meaning, to that which we have identified as its aboriginal dimension—the *Wissenschaftslehre*, or rather the multiple *Wissenschaftslehren* in which it consists, are all unique, incommensurable paths, completely generated from the problems that provide impulses towards active, dynamic, and collective experiments.

The *Wissenschaftslehre* cannot be reduced to schemas or finite structures. It does not cease, of course, to resort to diagrams, but its schemas

(of the type:  $\begin{matrix} A \\ xyz \cdot BT \end{matrix}$ ,  $B - T + C + L$ , and so on.<sup>7</sup>) are in no way static forms that organize the content of a doctrine and aid in the interpretation of it. As fluid, intuitive forms generated in the ‘trans-species’ passage from one way of seeing to a different way, these diagrams do not persist beyond the moment when, in the course of the lecture, they command a collective vision, itself in continuous self-formation. Their meaning must remain vague, uncertain, and our attention to them must be, as that of the kind we pay to drafts, already open to their metamorphosis to

<sup>7</sup> Borrowed from the Fourth Lecture of the second version of the *Wissenschaftslehre* 1804. See, for instance, *WL-1804*, 40, 72; *GA*, II/8: 52/53, 122/123.

come, a metamorphosis that would be the support of a different vision; the essential here remains the transformation of sight inseparable from a becoming-other. The schemas, images, and diagrams mobilized by the *Wissenschaftslehre* are in reality more events than structures. Generated by the experience of anthropo-ontological transformation of which the *Wissenschaftslehre* consists, they express the relationship of forces present in this experience—the tension of the vital and the lethal, of the centripetal and the centrifugal, and so on—and immediately take on a dramatic dimension; they are the events with which the unstable, genetic structure of the narrative by which the *Wissenschaftslehrer* attempts to keep his promise to make us see things that have never been seen before (*WL-1804*, 22; *GA*, II/8: 4/5), constructs itself.

As the movement of a continuous formation; as a mode of living speech, essentially itinerant, that tells a story but has no history, and that must be captured in the same moment in which it is told; as a conversion of constituted space (of writing and of the academic institution of knowledge) into constituting time, that is to say for the future—to the point that understanding it amounts, purely and simply, to practicing it via the reprise of its ambulant process, of a new collective itineration; the *Wissenschaftslehre* presents the traits of what Fichte calls ‘aboriginal thinking.’ It was difficult for us scholars of German Idealism to understand the meaning of the ‘should (*Soll*)’ that conditions its overall approach; now we see that it is because it denotes its experimental nature, its exclusively problematic mode, the impossibility of reducing its statements to an axiomatic or a categorical device from which they could be repeated independently of the singular problems to which they respond and that emerge throughout its experiment. It is, from this point of view, striking that the academic commentary of the *Wissenschaftslehre* has taken such great pains to formalize its explorations, which always take place off the beaten path, and the flow of images through which this exploring is practiced, by subjecting them to its model of intelligibility, its idea of a publically accessible essence. By formalizing them, cutting them into successive sequences, this commentary has thereby fabricated the false problem that has become the cross of interpreters, namely that of the exact number of identified sequences. There is no other way available to such an academic seizure of the *Wissenschaftslehre* than that of revers-



ing the aboriginal model by replacing the handiwork (*bricolage*) of the *Wissenschaftslehre*—which consists in making, through the shared event amongst its audience, an (anexact) structure—with the construction of a(n exact) structure likely to make history—meaning, a structure that is not likely to tell a story (that of a group, of an unstable collective subjectivity, a tribe [*Stamm*] or a minority), but is likely to be a major event in the universal history of philosophy. Fortunately, such an attempt has always more or less failed and, despite being an compulsory step for all the historians of German Idealism and anthologists, the *Wissenschaftslehre* remains, in face of the efforts of academics, a marginal contribution difficult to assimilate to history of thought.

### 3 The *Wissenschaftslehre*: an aboriginal and decolonial practice

The anthropology of the *Addresses to the German Nation* enables us to better understand the extent to which the *Wissenschaftslehre* is an embarrassment for the academic historiography of philosophy. It testifies to the presence, in the founding moment of the intellectual history of contemporary Europe (at the moment of one of its most powerful movements of universalization), of a form of thought that, in the framework of an academic production and in the context of a sweeping program of the reworking of the forms of Western rationality, realizes the characteristics of the savage mind<sup>8</sup>: the plurality of humanities and interspecies becoming, the genetic power of the non-representational and collective image, the construction of unstable structures through events. It is these characteristics that enable us to give a genuine account of the attempt, demanded by Fichte, to liberate thinking from the domination of the ontological model that has been adopted, almost without exception, by all of Western philosophy.

The principal characteristics of Western philosophy are indeed easily recognizable in the description of the philosophy of the *Ausland* given by the Seventh Address to the German nation. The *Ausland* is, here again,

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<sup>8</sup> Here I play on Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. John and Dorren Weightman (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966).

intimately linked to a principle of territoriality: Its 'essence [*Wesen*]' is, says Fichte, to believe in the existence of an 'impenetrable boarder' separating some 'final, fixed, immutably present' term from the flowing free play of life and to not be able to 'think or believe save by assuming such a border' (*AGN*, 86; *GA*, I/10: 184; translation modified). In contrast to the internal border, which defines the identity of aboriginal people as exclusively genetic or in becoming, the ontological boarder presupposed by the *Ausland* is primarily there to preserve the immutable from the exuberant flowing, the outpouring, of life within it—to preserve it from the contagion of death (the death of its congealed being) that it would, by being exposed to life, undergo.

It is with recourse to this border that Napoleonic violence is authorized, trampling the immanent sociality of peoples in the name of the universal and immutable principles of the Revolution. Furthermore, the violence of the *Ausland*, present in military occupation, exercises itself, first and foremost, on minds by disseminating a *doxa*—meaning, as ideology. This deadly ideology, one of paranoid essence, which sets against this free flowing the incorporeal identity of a total and static object ('*ein Stehendes*,' '*ein festes Sein*' [*AGN*, 86, 95; *GA*, I/10: 184, 194]), equally expresses itself, and independently of the Napoleonic military enterprise, in the best German philosophical productions contemporary to the *Addresses to the German Nation*. Under the influence of the *Ausland*, and subject to the lure of the Immobile—that which 'aspires to [*will*]' the inert—this production, notes Fichte, 'aspires to thoroughness scientific form [*Gründlichkeit und wissenschaftliche Form*],' 'reality and essence [*Realität und Wesen*],' turning away from the phenomenon (of the event), it 'aspires to the unity [*die Einheit*],' 'the foundation [*die Grundlage*],' on which it rests (*AGN*, 86; *GA*, I/10: 184). And he goes on to say 'in all these points'—thanks to this will (*Wille*) to immobility, and by taking advantage of the progress already accomplished by the *Ausland*—German philosophy 'is right [*hat recht*] and far surpasses the leading foreign philosophy [...] because it is more thorough and consistent in its foreignism [*Ausländerei*]' (*AGN*, 86; *GA*, I/10: 184). Consequently, subjugation is thus driven as far as it can be in a colonial context. The colonized, having now abandoned its own practices, excels in the practices of the colonizer. Life no longer holds itself up by itself as it does in its own aboriginal

dimension: thinking, thus subjected by the same subjugation that also subjugates the colonizer himself, is concerned above all to assign a 'support [Träger]' to life, and a 'crutch [Stütze]' (AGN, 87; GA, I/10: 185). Philosophy, sold to the requirement of being supported, authoritatively imposes the necessity of such a support on that which, in life, is sufficient on its own terms.

'True philosophy' sets itself against this contemporary, *ausländisch* philosophy (AGN, 87; GA, I/10: 185). It, 'which is complete in itself and has penetrated beyond appearance to its very core [zum Kerne], proceeds from the one, pure divine life' (AGN, 87; GA, I/10: 185). This does not mean that it proceeds from a life unified under one *principle*, a life subdued behind a border that restrains its flow, which threatens to infiltrate its own immobile substrate. Instead, it comes from life understood as 'life simply as such [als Leben schlechtweg], which will remain for all eternity ever one' (AGN, 87; GA, I/10: 185), meaning 'a life'—without being the life of this or that individual, that is, a formed, stable subject—that consists in the constant rhythmic beating of an opening and a closing, of an *arsis* and of a *thesis*, of a determination and an indetermination, by which the continuous formative activity, the infinite *sich bilden* of the aboriginal people, carries itself out.

We are used to considering German philosophy as *German* philosophy, regarding it as exemplary of the emergence of a national philosophy at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But it is, in reality, that which is *the least* German, a foreign thinking entirely subordinated to the prestige of the Immobile and that which this idol required of it—that which, in the fourth chapter of *Creative Evolution*, Bergson identifies as a Greek syndrome<sup>9</sup>—a thinking that negates *all* national life as such. For it renders impossible the life of a nation without State, a life identical to the permanent symbolic invention of the people by themselves.

But how are we thus to understand the fact that the *Wissenschaftslehre*, which claims to be this true national-aboriginal philosophy, also meets the requirements imposed by the *Ausland* (scientific form, the realization of unity, the immutable foundation of the mutable, the determination of being supporting all reality) to such a degree that one was earnestly able

<sup>9</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Dover, 1998), 341 ff.

to devote entire books to how it meets them? It is not enough to put the blame on our academic institution, which has seized the *Wissenschaftslehre* for its self. The *Wissenschaftslehre* itself always begins by addressing the types of questions that interest philosophers. Its goal is to introduce them to life, and there is no other way for it, no other pedagogy, save by starting over the philosophical project using categories that are its own in order then to bring it to its conclusion. One does not *decolonize* thinking without *first inhabiting the very structures of colonial thought*. However, decolonization does not lead back to an aboriginal existence understood as the ‘purity’ of a primitive state accessible by the mere subtraction of all that had come to be added to it. It is necessarily a process of *hybridization*. The aboriginal German that excels in the academic research projects aspiring to unity is already, in a sense, a mixed being. But this mixed aspect must be made manifest, and from it a decolonial hybridization can be constructed for the purpose of achieving, against the grain of academic excellence, a practice that is aboriginal and no longer *ausländisch* like the philosophy of the *Ausland*. By applying a mode at once genetic, problematic, and dramatic to the categories of thought stemming from the *Ausland*, the *Wissenschaftslehre* is such a practice.

## 4 The *Wissenschaftslehre* as psychiatry

Fichte specifies the exact nature of this practice in 1809 in one of the ‘Berlin Introductions’ to the *Wissenschaftslehre* where he presents the latter as a teaching seeking to implement an authentic ‘*medicinam mentis*.’<sup>10</sup> In Greek, we would say ‘psychiatry.’ But what kind of psychiatric practice? Simply posing this question entails a profound modification of what almost all of us have maintained—out of habit or conviction—concerning the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

Why? Because we cannot answer the question ‘What kind of psychiatry does the *Wissenschaftslehre* seek to implement?’ just by listing, one by one, the theoretical propositions concerning the empirical and the tran-

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<sup>10</sup> See ‘Zu der Einleitung in die gesammte Philosophie, die da ist Anleitung zum Philosophieren,’ in *GA*, II/11: 261.

scendental, the absolute, and its phenomenon, the I and Nature, and so on, no matter the talent with which this is done. For these theoretical propositions as they emerge in the *Wissenschaftslehre*—those of criticism, transcendentalism, idealism, and so on—are, strictly speaking, like all the theoretical content of a psychiatric practice—of all psychiatry, whether it be scientific or traditional, Western, Amerindian or African, rationalist (in the narrow sense or the term) or not. They are mere technical operators within a therapeutic device with wide reach. In themselves, they are by no means curative. Their function within this therapeutic device is rather to divert the patient's attention, namely all those who are involved in the healing process initiated in the lecture room, from the technical activity of the therapist, from the subterfuge that he or she invents in each case with the sole purpose of enabling an effective, transference interaction with the patient.

In short, what we are accustomed to analyzing and writing commentary on—the literal text from we obtain an undeniable intellectual pleasure—is absolutely silent concerning the truth of the psychiatric process that the *Wissenschaftslehre* in fact seeks to implement. The pleasure that we experience from the theoretical speculations it gives us is indeed intimately linked to the medicinal and exclusively technical function of its theoretical content, which solely aims to inscribe the actual therapeutic process in a separate, secret universe—namely, that of pure speculation—foreign to the world in which the actual interaction of the therapist and patient concretely takes place. Well, to some extent—anyway. For it may be the case that paying exclusive attention to its theoretical lure diverts our gaze away from the technical process so much that the patient or therapist, fascinated by the lure and its intrinsic luminosity, refuses to enter into the therapeutic interaction. The fact that we were able to become so enamored of the theoretical content of the *Wissenschaftslehre* that we could not see anything of its own practical and curative dimension, and even denied it, attests to this.

This dimension, however, has been repeatedly emphasized by Fichte. We did not hesitate to put the *Wissenschaftslehre* in a bibliography, nor to write books about it that have, in their turn, expanded this bibliography we have labeled 'Fichtean.' Expanding bibliographies—the writing of books—is certainly the dominant, almost exclusive, mode of aca-

demic activity. More precisely, it is the dominant mode of its ontological and political activity as that which determines what is and assigns to each thing the place that it is to occupy in a certain order or regime of being. And we are academics of the university—inheritors of Suárez and Aquinas—whose job is to maintain bibliographies and to cultivate the belief in the ‘ontological’ virtue of the book. The fact remains that, if we pay heed to Fichte’s own warning, the *Wissenschaftslehre* remains totally incomprehensible to those who read and write about it. We must, therefore, concede that by perpetuating the written commentary on the theoretical propositions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, we stubbornly continue to keep this misunderstanding alive.

It is self-evident. Who can claim to judge, understand, and evaluate without having actually practiced a medicine, like any form of psychiatry, that mobilize a theoretical and technical device as complex as the *Wissenschaftslehre*? How can we justify, if not by the Institution to which we belong, our allegiance to a theoretical *a priori*—the ‘bibliographical’ *a priori*—that is by no means a theoretical *a priori* of the object to which we apply it, despite the fact that we do so, to put it provocatively, with the with self-importance of a Jesuit missionary or a state official? A few years ago, Hartmut Traub invited me, in a private conversation, to pick up the work of the *Wissenschaftslehre*—to reopen the space constituted by Fichte’s lectures in order to perform the *Wissenschaftslehre* anew. Was it a matter of inventing new ‘versions’ of the *Wissenschaftslehre*? To perform once again, to re-enact the ‘versions’ published by us, which are the archaeological trace of performances that were, in fact, only ever realized by Fichte in interaction with his audience and could therefore serve as—albeit strictly speaking they cannot be—scores for a new dramatic interpretation? In any case, such an invitation is one of the most important suggestions there is for understanding the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

## 5 Theory and cultural inductors

This does not mean that the theoretical (say, philosophical) content of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is without interest. It is even of the highest interest! To say that it obscures the perception of the technical process of therapy by enveloping the latter with a speculative aura—indeed, even by giving

it its own magical, marvelous dimension of a secret knowledge acquired by initiation (does the *Wissenschaftslehre* not promise its audience access to something totally new, perfectly unheard of?)—does not mean its content is ineffective. If its theoretical content diverts a lot of our attention from the activity of the therapist, which, in reality, consists of a series of purely formal gestures, it does, however, guarantee that these actions have an effectiveness of their own by giving them the weight and seriousness of actions that are to be completed in an order of reality placed above the world of ordinary life.

But, above all, the theoretical content of the *Wissenschaftslehre* plays the valuable role of a cultural inductor, for there is no psychiatric practice—meaning interaction between patient and therapist and hence especially the possibility of transference—without such cultural inductors. Neither the patient nor the therapist can, in fact, enter the psychiatric relationship without first agreeing on the theoretical *a priori(s)* that determine the ethnological area or, if one prefers, the cultural world, in which they will build their relationship and in the context of which an appropriate diagnosis and treatment can be determined. No psychiatric practice can do without such a world. Strictly speaking, there is no purely scientific psychiatric practice—to wit, a psychiatric practice that would consist of anything other than a relationship of reciprocal action within one and the same ethnologically qualified and shared world.

What are the cultural or ethnological inductors of psychiatry established by the *Wissenschaftslehre*? What world does it convoke for the purpose of its constructions and curative operations? To respond in an impromptu manner: the cultural world of white, Christian Europe as dominated by the duality (developed from a reconstruction of its Greek heritage) of that which subsists in itself, for itself or by itself, and of that which exists by something other than itself, of which it is the manifestation, image or thought. A division that splits in two the totality of the real and engenders a series of oppositions that are, moreover, not necessarily equivalent: being and appearance, the internal and the external, body and soul, nature and culture, the immutable and the mutable, and so on. In contrast, in Yanomami thought (an Amazonian people), this division does not exist: the image of beings is, to put it in our language and our theoretical apparatus, that which is the most substantial. The

reason for this is that the image is completely beyond the reflexive form of thought that, for a European, characterizes thinking in itself—a form that the *Wissenschaftslehre* has explored to its furthest limits. The language in which the psychiatric interaction of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is carried out is, moreover, the German language as the vehicle and semiotic structuring of this fundamental duality and the oppositions it induces.

The ethnological area in which the psychiatry of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is realized is this one. It is that which the therapist convokes from the outset—because it is the area of his or her audience (who are, in virtue of the principle of transference interaction that he or she seeks to implement, just as much patients as guardians of the *Wissenschaftslehre*). It is, with all of its representations and language, that which provides the technical framework for his or her psychiatric operations.

## 6 The *Wissenschaftslehre* as ethnopsychiatry of exile

But things are more complex. For Fichte the psychiatrist from Northern Europe does something we would not expect. To understand this, we must, once again, briefly recall some fundamental features of his political thinking—since any psychiatric practice is, first of all, a form of politics—and particularly those that relate to the question of colonialism.

As demonstrated by the dedication of *The Closed Commercial State*, written in Berlin on 31 October 1800, where he denounces the African slave trade and the colonial plunder of the rest of the world by Europeans,<sup>11</sup> Fichte is, I would argue, ethnologically conscious—ethnologically and, consequently, environmentally. We will not be through with colonialism as long as London will not be deprived of tea, Vienna of chocolate, Paris or Rome of coffee, or Amsterdam of diamonds—as long as Europe will not be content to make and consume only what can be produced in its own natural soil. In other words, to put the matter more provocatively, we will not be through with it as long as we are not willing to admit

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<sup>11</sup> J.G. Fichte, *The Closed Commercial State*, trans. Anthony Curtis Alder (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 86 f.; GA, I/7: 43 f.



that a beech is not a palm tree and that Europe must make do without the latter. *The Closed Commercial State* is, first and foremost, a plan for the decolonization of Europe. Fichte's ethnological consciousness is, as we have seen, what drives him to elaborate, through the concept of the *Urvolk*, the notion of an aboriginal German identity. Aside from the seventeenth-century experiment carried out by Gross Friedrichsburg on the Gold Coast, soon annexed by the Dutch, the Germans remained, up to the second half of the nineteenth century, very much on the margins of the European enterprise of plundering Africa and the New World. The concept of *Ausländer* that Fichte sets against that of the *Urvolk* has undoubtedly much to do with that of the colonizers: they who, acting contrary to any culture or indigenous way of thinking, no longer live off the plant, animal, mineral, linguistic, intellectual, and other resources of their country (*Land*), but endlessly wander out of the country (*aus dem Land*) to conquer new spaces and destroy the ecosystems of which they do not even have the slightest notion and to which the imagination of local peoples are nevertheless intimately linked.

The colonizers are, therefore, those who, strictly speaking, have lost all imagination and at the end of the day must, as it were, haunt the oceans as the Flying Dutchman, a fleeting image of which was gleaned from Bartolomeu Dias' shipwreck off the coast of the Cape of Good Hope, who, alongside Pedro Álvares Cabral, was one of the people to have discovered Brazil—the legendary Portuguese-Dutch figure of the wandering colonizer who, from the very depths of the Kingdom of Saxony, will fascinate Wagner, the master of the German polyphonic sadness. The beech that wants to be a palm tree is the colonizer, a person without quality and without name. It is in this light, as we have already shown, that Fichte interprets the French invasion of Germany under the leadership of a Corsican adventurer, now a self-proclaimed emperor: as an attempt of an internal colonization of Europe and of its aboriginal peoples by the *Ausland*, or, more precisely, by *Nichtursprünglichkeit* as the principle of all colonization, for colonization cannot be exclusively reduced to economic and political domination. It is an anthropological phenomenon that involves, in a thoroughgoing fashion, thinking and its categories, even those that we call 'transcendental.' However, from this point of view, the duality of being and existence, of the one and the many, of the ultimate

foundation and flowing life, their territorialization on the two sides of an impassable border—in short, all the oppositions that constitute the cultural inductor of the new type of psychiatry that the *Wissenschaftslehre* seeks to implement and with which it, in each exposition, begins, is also the opposition that structures the whole of the European colonial commercial and religious enterprise: the opposition of marble and myrtle, of the firmness of faith and the Christian-European identity versus inconstancy of the savage soul.

Furthermore, what this psychiatry chooses as a cultural or ethnological inductor to establish the technico-theoretical framework for its therapy is that which directly penetrates into the heart itself of Western, white, and Christian pathology, into to the European-colonial paranoid object: the total and static object (*‘ein Stehendes,’ ‘ein festes Sein’*), perfectly self-identical and opposed to the free flow of differences. Similarly, when the ethnopsychiatrist listens to his Malian, Algerian, Mauritanian patient, he or she does so in the language and the traditional medicinal culture of the sick—because it is, evidently, due to the presence of this language and medicine specifically that the patient is sick. One does not cure a case of possession by a dybbuk by starting with a diagnosis of hysteria. Most often—indeed, almost always—the person is sick because they were exiled, uprooted, violently taken out of his or her home only to find him- or herself in a country that does not make a world for him or her. The psychiatry of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is, in the same way, an ethnopsychiatry in the sense that it treats an exiled humanity, turned *ausländisch* all the way down to its very thinking and language, and is thus affected by the same symptoms as the migrant patients of ethnopsychiatry. Fichte describes these symptoms *ad nauseam* (moroseness and distress, the exhaustion of vital forces, anxiety and insomnia, or even, as in *The Vocation of Man*, nocturnal hallucination),<sup>12</sup> with the difference, which is highly significant, that it can reconstruct the envelope that has been torn apart and sew it back together in order to bring back the breath of life that slips and overflows out of it, by recourse to the resources of another language or a culture other than its own. Its language, logic,

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<sup>12</sup>In the last case, I am referring to the spirit that comes to visit the narrator. See *The Vocation of Man*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 27 ff.; *GA*, I/6: 215.

thinking, and philosophy, are colonized, self-colonized, to the point that the disease, the trauma of exile, the loss of *Ursprünglichkeit*, are said in the language, logic, thinking, and philosophy themselves of the colonizers, to the point that the aboriginal—that which was there before the colonists arrived and got involved—is to be *invented* by the psychiatric process of decolonization. The *Wissenschaftslehre* signifies a post-colonial ethnopsychiatry in a completely different sense from the ethnopsychiatry of George Devereux or of Tobie Nathan<sup>13</sup>: in the sense that it tries to heal the white Christian European of temperate zones, saving us from its own colonial tropism by creating a first people—in other words, by ‘making us native.’

This is a fundamental—anthropological—characteristic of decolonial Europe that applies, for example, just as well in this other psychiatric enterprise of Deleuze-Guattarian schizoanalysis: constructing a regenerated, genital body, creator of organs there where there are no organs, inventing a people where a people cannot be found. In both cases we proceed by a non-regressive involution to a new primitiveness. How else could it be done? At the end of the day, modern, colonial Europe owed the totality of its material and institutional (meaning, intellectual, moral, aesthetic, and even critical) wealth to its destructive exploitation of the peoples of the world and their natural resources to such an extent that it no longer had any identity other than the one it forged over centuries through the acquisition of these new riches. So how else could it take part in the project of decolonization of the world save by inventing that which, precisely because it has too much, it does not have, namely that which other peoples—this being the meager privilege of the slave—were able to secretly keep, while it deprived itself thereof while trying too hard to deprive others of what they had?

The practice of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is entirely devoted to the invention of a new native people. The truth it invents is that of the identity of being (*Sein*) and of life (*Leben*), of the I (*Ich*) and the We (*Wir*), which constitutes the ground of any indigenous identity. But how are we to

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<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, George Devereux, *Ethnopschoanalysis: Psychoanalysis and Anthropology as Complementary Frames of Reference* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) and *Basic Problems of Ethnopsychiatry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) and Tobie Nathan, *La Folie des autres. Traité d'ethnopsychiatrie clinique* (Paris: Dunod, 1986).

invent such an identity when it is not native? How are we to invent a new native people? How are we to become native? Are we to borrow from the Inuit an ancestral practice of sacred hunting, like the fabulating boatmen of Canadian documentary filmmaker Pierre Perrault? Are we to manufacture African Haouka deities with the entities of colonial society in order to bring them into a trance ritual, as done by Jean Rouch's *Les Maîtres Fous*? We will do both. For the Malian dokers in *Les Maîtres Fous* actually do nothing different from what the descendants of Jacques Cartier do on the Isle-aux-Coudres: The religion of the Haouka that they have there created from scratch is not theirs (which they lost upon arriving at Accra to serve white civilization), but consists in an exercise—just as exalted as strictly formal—of gestures and indigenous practices that have been completely decontextualized.

The problematic of the psychiatry that the *Wissenschaftslehre* seeks to implement is, in this way, very traditional. It is characteristic of the pathologies of exile. As a care-giving tool, it aims at healing by means of transformation, the transformation being, in the traditional problematic exemplified by the myth of Dionysus (*diogonos*: born twice), inseparable from a rebirth or resurrection. By invoking from the outset, as it does almost systematically, the figures of the indigenous Prussian academic Immanuel Kant and the Jewish, Portuguese philosopher Bento de Espinosa, Latinized and Dutchified with the name of Spinoza, Fichte demarcates the ethno-geographical-political space of a cure where two indigenous peoples communicate with each other: The people of German indigeneity and those peoples dominated by the colonial or *ausländische* Portuguese-Dutch world, who have an eye towards Africa and the New World. For these two figures, usually set against one another by the commentators of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, are not so antagonistic as it may seem. Here, again, the theory that sets the philosopher of freedom against the philosopher of necessity obscures our sight. Their antagonism is a cultural *topos*—the opposition of the sedentary life to that of the migrant—by which we can begin to introduce a therapeutic relationship, but which must be immediately undone. Whether it is a question of Kant's or Spinoza's philosophy, the *Wissenschaftslehre* in fact strikes an accord, without qualification, with their central theorem: the absolute as the unity of being and thinking beyond their separation in consciousness,

or being as life. But this accord is not what really matters. What matters is their failure, or a more general collective failure, to internalize these theorems in a lively and active manner—with the energy and the vigor sufficient to be transformed by them—in order to, according to the very expression used by Fichte, become them. The reason for this lies, once again, in writing: the Kantian way of writing, which divides the unity of being and thinking into three absolutes, one per book (*WL-1804*, 31 ff.; *GA*, II/8: 26 ff./27 ff.), or the writing of the *Ethics*, which does not self-reflexively know what it does and so kills the living absolute in order to make of it a dead being (*WL-1804*, 69; *GA*, II/8: 114 ff./115 ff.).

## 7 *Einbildungskraft*: an European psychotropic

How are we to carry out this transformation? How are we to revive that which is dead? As decolonial and European, Fichtean psychiatry has no other choice but to perform, outside of any truly indigenous context, the same gestures as indigenous thinking. The will (*Wille*) specific to colonial-*ausländisch* thinking is the will to unity (*Wille zur Einheit*) (see, again, *AGN*, 86; *GA*, I/10: 184). The frenzy of this lethal will is what led it to deny and mortify life simply as such (*das Leben schlechtweg*), to the point that the latter cannot hold itself up without a support (*Träger*), an ultimate foundation, a dead being whose immobility and immutability must be preserved by all means, including the enslaving and destruction of any form of that exuberant stream of life. How are we to give back to life *its* unique form unity, which requires no support? For, in reality, the being that supports all reality—the motionless, dead crutch (*Stütze*) that *ausländisch* thinking places at the foundation of life—is not enough to subdue the vital flow, which is overflowing and endlessly losing itself in a multiplicity that nothing sustains or restrains.

Fichte, the son of a ribbon weaver, knows that a true seam separates as much as it unifies, unifies and separates in one and the same gesture. The traditional psychiatric gesture is also a simultaneous unifying and separating gesture. It is, to put it in very precise and concrete terms, in this way an act of sewing. To see how traditional medicine can be understood via the metaphor of sewing, we must simply recall how, in the myth

of Dionysus, Dionysius, expelled from his maternal envelope during his first, traumatic birth, is then reborn after being sown into the therapeutic envelope of the paternal thigh, symbol of the seat of vital force. The absolute, expressed it in the language of the theory that serves as an inducator and obscuring factor, is a *Band*. The latter has nothing to do with a primacy of relation over substance, nor can it be made use of in the framework of the quarrel between realism and correlationism.<sup>14</sup> ‘*Band*’ designates the thin band, strip, or ribbon by which we attach, patch up, or tie together scattered pieces without thereby making them indistinct.

As Fichte insists in the prolegomena of the second version of the *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1804, in the act by which the *Wissenschaftslehrer-therapist* pre-constructs, for his audience, the unity and inseparability of the disjunction between being and thinking, the one and the many, of the immutable and mutable, the immanent and emanate, and so on, solely this act as act counts: *Tathandlung*, that is, the only thing that counts is, in Latin, the gesture, of *gerere*, which simultaneously signifies all dimensions of the *a priori* synthesis by which the therapist and his or her audience engender, in a transferential interaction, disjunction and unity ‘in one stroke [*in Einem Schlag*]’ (see, for instance, *WA-1804*, 34; *GA*, II/8: 37): of carrying or supporting in itself, producing and giving birth, acting, doing, managing, performing.

This is why Fichte, ever since the first exposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* in 1794–95, argues that the subject, torn between a centripetal movement of extreme self-concentration and a centrifugal movement of infinite self-dissipation (*WL-1794*, 240 ff.; *GA*, I/2: 406 ff.), cannot find its foundation (*Grund*) where there is no foundation. It being a form of self-positing (*sich setzen*) (*WL-1794*, 222; *GA*, I/2: 389), the subject cannot stand (*stehen*) where no crutch (*Stütze*) exists for it to rely on. Literally, it cannot be self-standing (*selbständig*, autonomous or independent) except under the condition that this performative act, consisting of positing itself (*sich setzen*), exists ‘as posted by itself [*als durch sich selbst gesetzt*]’ (*WL-1794*, 241; *GA*, I/2: 406)—or, to use the language of 1804,

<sup>14</sup> See Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (New York: Continuum, 2008).

under the condition that it engenders *in one stroke* the unification and separation of the self.

It is interesting to note that this gesture is also the gesture of traditional medicine. In the Yoruba language, for example, it is called 'Àjásó,' which Pierre Fatumbi-Verger translates as 'cut in order to assemble'<sup>15</sup> and which could be written as the portmanteau 'separassemble': the verb of 'ofò'—the active incantatory formula—of resurrection and transformation. In order to implement his psychiatric practice, Fichte wields the power of the verb in a similar way, intending nothing, as he emphasizes, but the psychic-physic-spiritual effect of his discourse. This also indicates his eagerness to act. This eagerness has little to do with a practice of transforming *the world*. More precisely, the psychiatric problem it faces is rather one of achieving a transformation that can *bring about a world where there is none*. This is why the *Wissenschaftslehre* has no object, but rather consists, from beginning to end, in the pre-construction of an active object that from one lecture series to another, and from one lecture of a given series to another, is completely overhauled through unexpected twists and turns and for various uses. But the uniqueness of its object is different, for example, from ofò. It does not mobilize a vegetal, animal, or mineral element. It does not require us to grind a plant or some vermin with a lightning stone. The elements that it grinds are theoretical. They are the abstract elements of the Western theoretical world. In Yoruba practice, the grinding of natural elements is intended to prepare a-signifying signs—which replace the logic of the signifier with their purely gestural logic—to enter into the resulting powder. Similarly here, the grinding of theoretical elements renders indistinct the culturally opposed categories on which doctrinal conflicts rest and empowers the prepositions (*Durch*, *Von*, and so on) and the conjunctions (*Als*) of argumentative discourse. By doing so, it makes the latter disintegrate and causes an eruption of different parasyntactic and asyntactic anomalies, transformations that make the translator's task next to impossible. At the end of the day, it produces an almost alliterative, sonorous discourse, the meaning of which is of little consequence in terms of the simple, 'separassembling' gesture that it performs, a gesture that posits and destroys, at

<sup>15</sup> See Pierre F. Verger, *Ewé: The Use of Plants in Yoruba Society* (Sao Paulo: Obdebracht, 1995).

the same time, all deadly divisions, and in terms of the incantation that accompanies it and only requires it to perform the gesture.

The similarity of the Fichtean psychiatric approach with the indigenous medicinal one is impossible to deny. But it is more than a question of mere similarity. The theory that acts as an inductor and obscuring factor also acts as material. It comes to replace the living matter, absent from the process, whose trituration and ingestion are nevertheless the real conditions of traditional resurrection-metamorphosis. What is most blatantly lacking in this picture are plants. A Dionysian transformation does not work, as is well known, without the intoxication brought on by the ingestion of fermented plants. Our philosophers may well get drunk on wine or, as Schelling, get high on opium. But this practice remains outside the medicinal process, taking place, as it were, privately and they try to hide it. The fact is that Europe is seriously lacking in psychotropic plants. It barely has twenty, while Native Americans have discovered over a hundred. Once again, we encounter the law of the beech and the palm tree. However, there is no complete transformation without a psychotropic plant—yākoana datura, peyote, and so on—meaning without the direct, terrifying experience of death. All one has to do is listen to the story that the contemporary Yanomami shaman Davi Kopenawa tells of his initiation through yākoana powder, extracted from the bark of the virola tree, to understand that death by way of a psychotropic is the condition of the rebirth that resurrects one from the death caused by the epidemic fumes of colonization.<sup>16</sup> White people only have this experience accidentally, in the form of intoxication, as in the case of ergotism, and do not know how to master it, to face it—because, as demonstrated by most Western philosophy, they are afraid of death, which they conceive as a black hole, a bottomless abyss from which everything is born and where everything returns.

How are we to make do without a plant? If a psychotropic plant is required, it is only because of its force (*Kraft*). It is the force that knocks out or kills, the force that irresistibly delights us. Nobody is capable of such in the natural world without the help of such a force. It is in no

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<sup>16</sup>See, for instance, Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman*, trans. Nicholas Elliott and Alison Dundy (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2013), 66.



case a matter of ability. Here, again, a replacement must be used. The replacement for the vegetative force mobilized by the *Wissenschaftslehre* is imagination (*Einbildungskraft*). ‘*Einbildungskraft*’: a term that could just as well be used in botany to describe a psychotropic bud, under the stipulation that we take ‘bud’ in the literal sense of its likely etymological origins in the Old French ‘*boter*,’ that which has the force to thrust out of the way, to push forward, and ‘psychotropic’ in the sense of that which is capable of guiding the *psukhê* by inducing modifications of consciousness and, in particular, by provoking the formation of unprecedented mental images (*Bilder*). The decolonial and European therapeutic gesture of the *Wissenschatslehre* performs the indigenous gesture outside of an indigenous context, and specifically outside of the natural conditions that belong to the traditional medicine, the incredible richness of which is visible in African or Native botany. It will therefore resort to this particular, specifically European psychotropic that is *Einbildungskraft*. It is explicitly identified by Fichte as the instrument of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, its *organon* (see, for instance, *WL-1794*, 206 ff.; *GA*, I/2: 372). It is this that must be first possessed, cultivated, and practiced by its audience-actors. It is under the effect of its irresistible impulse to tear down any fixity, any ground, that the terms that are opposed to one another in any division are made to waver (*Schweben*). It is the force that forms the triple wavering—the wavering between two waverings—by which quintuple syntheses are produced, and this force thus realizes the unity of inseparability and separation that, independent of all content, is the only thing that matters in the therapeutic act.

In this lies the contribution of the *Wissenschaftslehre* to contemporary anthropology—more precisely, to a non-narcissistic anthropology of ourselves that would enable us to welcome non-European knowledge, enable it to shed light upon ourselves: the psychiatric practice that it attempts to ground and sets against the melancholization of colonial Europe is a traditional practice of rebirth for us who lack, however, all that which is, in traditional psychiatry, indispensable for healing (a people, living matter, psychotropic plants, supernatural beings). The *Wissenschaftslehre* must invent all of this, producing replacements in the very movement that carries out its gesture. If we were to take up the Fichtean performance—reopen the space of the Fichtean cure, attempt

new *Wissenschaftslehren*—it would be necessary to keep this in mind. We would certainly have to mobilize other theoretical contents, cultural inductors different from those through which Fichte brought his audience into the cure, grind other speculative matters, undo in another way the righteousness of our language, and employ the powerful resources of sound reinforcement systems and visual projection, of TV and film production, that we have at our disposal now. Perhaps we could even succeed in making ourselves into a palm tree without destroying a single palm tree in the tropics, to make ourselves into a palm tree from the beech tree that we are. We simply have to find a way to open our performances to different languages, different ways of speaking, and different kinds of vision, ones completely other than our own.

# 8

## Hegel on the Universe of Meaning: Logic, Language, and Spirit's Break from Nature

Joseph Carew

### 1 Introduction

Contra a longstanding tradition, I argue that there is *no* question of Hegel's *Science of Logic* being a metaphysical treatise.<sup>1</sup> It is, as the title already suggests, a systematic work *of logic* in the strictest sense of the word: an account of the principles of thinking. Nevertheless, despite being a logical treatise, a traditional or contemporary logician might not readily recognize it as one. This is because, for Hegel, logic is never a mere formal codification of the principles of proof like in the Aristotelian system of logic, nor is it an artificial language like the ones logicians today are wont to develop to better explore these principles.

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<sup>1</sup> This tradition, today the most popular, largely goes without opposition. For two of its most popular contemporary expressions, see Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006) and Friedrich Beiser, *Hegel* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

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Hegel's wager is that logic, as the pure structure underlying thinking, the medium of which is conceptualization, must display a deep bond with the natural languages in which concepts are not merely housed, but come to be born as ways of comprehending the various aspects of the world—that language itself, if it is to be thus capable of concept formation and comprehension at all, must internally contain, as a crucial part of its functioning, the logical rules through which the process of conceptualization is grounded.

But language is not, unlike traditional and contemporary systems of logic, a specialized discourse whose purpose is to guarantee the correctness of thinking. This is a pivotal point. It is how we give meaning to our existence, how we make the latter intelligible. As such, this deep bond between logic and language radically expands the subject matter of logic beyond proof. No longer merely concerned with valid reasoning, it also shows itself as the foundation of *the universe of meaning* that we, discursively through language, bring forth to interpret the world around us and ourselves as a part thereof. *Any* codification of its principles or artificial language designed to increase precision in thinking therefore appears as an abstraction from this more primordial level of logic that is *always already* active as soon as we begin speaking, for any speech act, by bringing conceptual distinctions into play, consequently depends on the logical rules at the heart of conceptualization.

This implies that logic, for Hegel, falls under what we would today call 'semantics.' But if the *Logic* is a philosophy of language, it is one quite different from others that have been espoused in recent philosophical history. Instead of focusing on the analysis of ordinary language, culturally rooted language games, differential systems of signifiers, semantic internalism or externalism, pragmatism, and so on, it attempts to show the dependence of language on the universal and necessary principles of human rationality. That is, it seeks to show how our language, as that through which the life of conceptualization takes place, is only capable of producing meaning because language itself possesses what I call a 'logical syntax.' Immanently analyzing this syntax, the *Logic* has two major goals: first, to show how it is that which permits a subject matter, through our discourse about it, to become

intelligible for us as something objective; second, to determine the degree to which the types of discourse that it thereby makes possible may succeed at this task.

These above-mentioned features alone would be enough to secure the contemporary relevance of Hegel's *Logic*. But I further argue that what makes the *Logic* continue to stand out and resonate with us as a theory of semantics is not just the innovative claim it advances concerning the deep bond between logic and language or the way in which it formally outlines the types of discourse of which we are capable and their intrinsic limits. It is its ability, in a *completely logical register*, to tell us important features of the world at large and our place in it. What it reveals is how nature, materially open in its becoming, *does not exhibit* the internal stability realized in the pure structure of our logical syntax. The fundamental thesis of the *Logic* is therefore that 'the concept'—its technical word for the medium of conceptualization through which the activity of thinking can discursively construct intelligible objects—is, when thus raised to its rightful role in the creation of a universe of meaning, *never* metaphysically innocent. Quite to the contrary, it demonstrates that there is a *hiatus* between the domains of nature and spirit, a *hiatus* caused by logic and language themselves, for in displaying how the categories of logic at the heart of natural language constitute a self-contained, self-justifying system, the *Logic* shows that the very fact that we are linguistic beings means that we are driven to break from nature to bring forth a world of spirit that obeys its own rationally decided, non-natural norms. In this way, Hegel gives an account of how language creates the gap separating first and second nature, a gap that prevents the reduction of the latter to the former, but a gap that is in no way obscure or mysterious because it can be explained in the clarity and transparency demanded by logic. Nor does this logical or linguistic account simply deny our origins in nature. It presupposes it. As such, Hegel's *Logic* provides us with resources to rethink the relationship between the physical sciences and the humanities by sketching an as yet unexplored option for comprehending the relationship between nature and spirit in which there is a simultaneous continuity and discontinuity between each. And it does so quite originally without ever leaving the realm of semantic theory.

## 2 A Note on 'Deflationary' Readings

The interpretation I propose has much affinity with the so-called 'deflationary' reading of Hegel. Given the prevalence of these in the literature and criticisms against them, I would like to say something about them to help orient the reader and also briefly explain why I feel the need to offer yet another as an improved take on Hegel. Perhaps the most prominent defenses today of this approach in terms of a reading of the *Logic* are those given by Terry Pinkard, who interprets the *Logic* as an account of the various 'conceptions' (his preferred translation of '*Begriff*') that thinking can engage in to comprehend the world and that have also, in a different register, played out historically,<sup>2</sup> and Robert B. Pippin, who interprets it as a Kantian investigation into the subjective-conceptual conditions of intelligibility, equipped with a novel theory of the role of transcendental apperception.<sup>3</sup> Another now classical deflationary reading that deserves mention is that of Klaus Hartmann's category theory.<sup>4</sup> On his reading, Hegel's primary goal was to freely reconstruct all the major determinations of the real discovered by experience, science, and philosophy with the aim of placing them, now distilled as categories, into a rational system that can explain them vis-à-vis one another. Although there are many more out there in the literature, we can take these three as broadly representative of the major camps referred to the most: Hegel the philosopher of philosophical explanation itself, Hegel the Kantian, and Hegel the category theorist.

My interpretation, however, stands in stark contradistinction to these three types, even if I owe much to their rethinkings of Hegel. The fundamental deficiency of these readings is that none of them explicitly treat the fact that Hegel claims that there is a deep bond between logic and language. This needs rectification, but one that leads us to drastically modify their proposals. For instance, while I argue, like Pinkard, that

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<sup>2</sup>Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Dialectic: The Explanation of Possibility* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988). This is, at least, Pinkard's old position.

<sup>3</sup>Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>4</sup>Klaus Hartmann, 'Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View,' *Hegel: A Collection of Essays*, ed. A. MacIntyre (New York: Double Day, 1972).

Hegel's *Logic* is an idiosyncratic kind of 'meta-discourse,' I maintain that it is a discourse about the very condition of the possibility of discourse *tout court* rather than just a discourse about the discourse of *philosophy*. This slight change of emphasis makes all the difference. For while the *Logic* does argue that language is necessarily a process by which we build conceptions of the world around us, to express this point in the way Pinkard does distracts us from the fact that these conceptions are made possible by the very language we use *in everyday just as much as philosophical contexts and even without realizing that we are doing so*. Hegel is talking less about the philosopher's language in particular than he is about the language that pervades the activity of spirit in every facet of its being. The *Logic* is not just a specialized discourse, but the way spirit is in the world. The ambiguity arises because he thinks language makes us all philosophers from the very beginning simply because we strive for meaning.

As for Pippin, I would contend that he places too much emphasis on the subject's constituting powers. Hegel himself is just as interested in the universe of intelligible *objects* that may arise through thinking as the activity of *the subject* itself, as evinced in the very division of the *Logic* into an 'objective' and 'subjective' part. This enables Hegel to anticipate the ways in which the world might be intelligible once comprehended by thinking, moving beyond the Kantian concern for the subjective-conceptual conditions of intelligibility towards being concerned with what the world out there might be like. Once again, the reference to language brings this point home. A language is, after all, *nothing* without the world that it speaks about it, that it makes intelligible through its medium; a language that exists only in a grammar book is not truly a language.

Nor should my approach be confused with that of Hartmann. Where Hartmann argues that Hegel's *Logic* is a free reconstruction of all the major determinations of the real discovered by experience, science, and philosophy into a system, I fear that in such an interpretation the *Logic* is always in danger of being reduced to a kind of second-order discourse that rearranges (this is indeed one of Hartmann's preferred words to describe what it does) first-order discourses. Necessarily taking the material given by the latter for granted, it can do nothing but systematize this material with the intention of justifying the fundamental categories active within it. In other words, it *reinforces* rather than *founds* these discourses, which

goes against those places where Hegel explicitly says that logic is first philosophy (that is, metaphysics). Language allows us to keep this foundational role in tact, all the while saying it is a kind of category analysis: Since the syntax of a language is that which *enables* us to talk about the world, and eventually form the scientific and philosophical discourses that theorize it, the *Logic* simply explains how this syntax, due to its basis in logic, *makes language as conceptualization possible*.

If my interpretation builds on these three by modifying them in terms of Hegel's references to language in the *Logic*, there is one further way in which my interpretation differs from these three and indeed differs drastically from most other so-called 'deflationary' interpretations. This has already been hinted at above in the introduction. I claim that Hegel himself also advances a series of novel metaphysical theses *via* his category analysis, theses that may allow Hegel to enter into new contemporary debates concerning the relationship between nature and spirit.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, my own reading comes the closest to that offered by H.S. Harris<sup>6</sup> and more recently that of George di Giovanni (who also emphasizes the role of language in the *Logic*).<sup>7</sup> What they emphasize is that we should never deny the speculative reach of the *Logic* as a work of *formal* logic because even if it is taken, respectively, as a unique theory of world interpretation or discourse, 'the philosophy of nature is,' as di Giovanni's puts it, 'never far from Hegel's mind.'<sup>8</sup> Building on these suggestions, I can also

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Hartmann, who explicitly says: 'we do not come to "know" things we did not know when we read through Hegel's categorial arrangement; we merely learn about the rational explanation of categories. From this angle, Hegel's position in the *Logic* is an innocuous one, as it cannot possibly conflict with knowledge' ('Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View,' 109). This is because Hartmann argues it is a reconstruction of established discourses.

<sup>6</sup> See H.S. Harris, *Hegel's Ladder*, 2 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: Hackett, 1997), in particular chapters 12 and 13 of vol. 2, and 'Lecture Notes on Hegel's *Encyclopedia Logic* [1830], prepared by H.S. Harris for a course during the academic year 1993–1994 at Glendon College, York University, Toronto,' *Manuscripts of H.S. Harris*, <http://hdl.handle.net/10315/943>.

<sup>7</sup> George di Giovanni, introduction to *Science of Logic*, by G.W.F. Hegel, ed. and trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> di Giovanni, introduction, xlv. This position, however, should be differentiated from that of John Burbidge, who likewise argues that the *Logic* is a work of *logic* and that the categories have speculative reach. Burbidge asserts that the categories, because they are historical productions of spirit, have been able to come to reflect the underlying structure of reality as thinking methodologically revised them over time. See *The Logic of Hegel's Logic: An Introduction* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2006), 34 f. I argue that the categories are simply logical categories.



offer a new non-metaphysical reading of the *Logic* capable of responding to criticisms that any such reading denies the speculative reach of Hegel's project because it is in no way 'deflationary.' By showing how all of this recent scholarship paves the way for such a new rethinking of Hegel, I also hope to motivate new readings of this scholarship. But let's now turn to Hegel on language, the key topic ignored in other non-metaphysical readings of the *Logic*.

### 3 Logic's Instinctual Embeddedness in Language

In the Preface to the second edition of the *Logic*, Hegel paves the way for his discussion with a series of penetrating meditations on human language. It is my contention that if we take these claims seriously, the standard picture of Hegel as a 'revisionist metaphysician of the concept' becomes highly implausible. For what we see is that Hegel is not advancing a thesis concerning the metaphysical identity of being and thinking such that the forms of thinking are, as it were, *the blueprints of the world out there* (now become self-conscious in humanity). We see, instead, a complex model of how language is able *to create a universe of meaning* in virtue of basic categories built into its very logical syntax. Being and thinking are identical, but only insofar as being, qua known or cognized, is a product of the activity of thinking that uses these categories as templates to recognize intelligibility in what it encounters in the world.

Hegel begins by remarking that although traditional logic as a discipline has failed to attain to the level of a genuine science insofar as 'what it offers here and there is only a bare thread, the dead bones of a skeleton thrown together in a disorderly heap,'<sup>9</sup> language may hold a key to its further development. 'The forms of thought are,' as Hegel puts it, 'first set out and stored in human *language*' (SL, 12; GW, 21: 10).

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<sup>9</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as SL], ed. and trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 12; GW, 21: 10. Citations of Hegel provide the pagination of the English translation followed by that of the *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968). References to the critical edition are given by the abbreviation GW, volume and page number.

But such a move may strike many readers as highly counterintuitive if not contradictory. Why should we begin a treatise *on logic*, the ostensibly *most pure* expression of thinking, with such preliminary considerations? Isn't language itself a *historical* production that displays mostly—if not only—fortuitous influences, as proven by the unpredictable evolution of world languages, while logic expresses something *universal and necessary*? Furthermore, while natural languages are *versatile but inherently ambiguous*, logic is *restrictive yet self-transparent* such that it would appear that the two cannot be so easily mapped unto one another. According to Hegel, however, it is precisely this way of thinking about logic and language that have prevented us from grasping their interrelated truth. Language is, at a fundamental level, more than a contingent linguistic system. To the extent that language as such is that through which *the life of conceptualization takes place*—is how *we make the world meaningful through the concepts produced by discourse*—it bears an intimate relation to thinking; and if thinking is itself dependent upon logic, as Hegel believes, our language itself has to be, by implication, logical at its very core.

The first step of Hegel's argument is the claim that language holds a privileged seat in human activity. Being more than a specialized capacity or faculty that we have *among others*, language is that through which all things must pass in order to have a conscious effect upon us. Anything that the human being comes to experience—including the stuff of 'sensing, intuiting, desiring, his needs and drives' (*SL*, 12; *GW*, 21: 11; translation modified)—is always already its product: '[i]n everything that the human being has interiorized, in everything that in some way or other has become for him a representation, in whatever he has made his own, there has language penetrated' (*SL*, 12; *GW*, 21: 10). No matter how directly given any particular content may appear, beneath it lies the profound intellectual work of making this content meaningful by, implicitly or explicitly, bringing distinctions into play by which we can recognize it and thus respond to it. There is no pure sensation because language is, as far as we are experientially concerned, *always already* written into our experience. This has the consequence that '*there is nothing in heaven or nature or spirit or anywhere else that does not contain just as much immediacy as mediation*' (*SL*, 46; *GW*, 21: 54).

Next, Hegel inquiries into what this means for our understanding of language. If language is indeed that through which experience takes on the meaning it exhibits, becomes consciously present, then language *in all its forms* must be more than a means of communication. More primordially, it shows itself to be the vessel of the thinking that pervades all things human. As creatures whose conscious awareness is thereby bound to language, *everyone of us* is a concept-monger from the very start of our spiritual life in that we must place conceptual distinctions on whatever appears to us in the senses before we can even experience it in the first place. Consequently, we are never content with the mere given contents of sensation: '[t]he *elevating* of spirit above the sensory,' as Hegel explains, 'its *process of going beyond* the finite towards the infinite, the *leap* that is made into the infinite by breaking off the series of sensory [events], all this is thinking itself, this transitioning is nothing but thinking.'<sup>10</sup> Our experience is contaminated, as it were, by the speculative moment of high-order reflection because language compels us to interpret everything we experience in terms of an interpretative framework that it provides: being thus driven *to think things over* (*EL*, 29, §2 Remark; *GW*, 20: 41), we are, to combine Satrean and Aristotelean metaphors, *condemned to wonder*.

If the concepts housed and that come to be born in language are that through which we make experience intelligible by dividing it into meaningful chunks, we must proclaim that '*language* is the product of thought' (*EL*, 52, §20 Remark; *GW*, 20: 41). Hegel's revolutionary logical gesture is the idea that this does not just mean that the finite concepts it employs (its contingent 'vocabulary,' ranging from 'mundane' concepts like 'rock' or 'cat' to more 'theoretical' ones like 'atom' or 'spirit') are the product of higher-order reflection. Just as empirical thinking can only occur because of the universal and necessary rules that make thinking itself possible, so too language is only possible because it is, in important respects, also a product of thought at this universal and necessary level. A proposition ('S is P') is, after all, a form of judgment. This entails that language itself

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<sup>10</sup> *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline Part I: Science of Logic* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *EL*], ed. and trans. Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 97, §50 Remark; *GW*, 20: 87.

depends upon logic insofar as logic is that which outlines the matrix underlying thinking *as such*. To the extent that *any* language, insofar as it is a language, is the vehicle through which spirit conceptualizes its world, through which it thinks, and logic is not particular nor accidental but universal and necessary, there will therefore be a self-identical core shared by *all* natural languages, a core that is simultaneously responsible for our ontological distinctiveness as creatures bound to language. Speaking of an individual ‘who has mastered a language and is also acquainted with other languages with which to compare it,’ Hegel revealingly says ‘[i]n the medium of the language, he can recognize the expression of spirit as spirit, and this is logic’ (*SL*, 36; *GW*, 21: 42).

This deep bond between logic and language presents us with two major conclusions concerning the status of logic. First, it indicates that language is the key to giving logic a new foundation. As such, the tradition was wrong to treat logic as a mere formal account of how we *ought* to think in specialized contexts. There is strong sense in which we *cannot help but use* the forms of logic in every moment of our being: Anything that we do, whether it be sensing, desiring, thinking, or acting, betrays the influence of logic. Second, any attempt to bestow upon logic the status of a science has to realize that there is a form of what Hegel refers to as ‘natural logic’ (*SL*, 15, 16, 18, 37; *GW*, 12: 13, 15, 16, 42), which precedes any formal logic we may create as its condition of possibility. But to the extent that language is something that mediates the world to us largely without our self-conscious control, we must state that, at its most primordial level, ‘[a]s drives the categories [of logic] do their work instinctively’ (*SL*, 17; *GW*, 21: 16; translation modified). In this regard, ‘[t]o bring to consciousness this *logical* nature that animates spirit, that moves and works within it, this is the task’ (*SL*, 17; *GW*, 21: 15; translation modified). In this way, the principal aims of the *Logic* come to the fore:

Therefore, inasmuch as the science of logic deals with the thought determinations that instinctively and unconsciously pervade our spirit everywhere—and remain non-objectified and unnoticed even when they enter language—it will also be a reconstruction of those determinations which reflection has already abstracted and fixed as subjective forms external to a material content. (*SL*, 19; *GW*, 21: 17–8)

## 4 The Logical Foundation of Discourse

How are we to make this normally hidden, yet all-pervasive natural logic completely transparent? According to Hegel, logic as it has been passed down to us decisively fails to do so. If logic is not simply an *organon* for guaranteeing well-formed formulas and valid inferences, but is tied up with language in all its forms, we must expand its domain. Inasmuch as language is that which makes the world meaningful by bringing it into conscious intelligibility through the act of making conceptual distinctions, logic must also contain principles, deposited in language itself, in virtue of which something *out there* can become a representation, exert a conscious force on me as something different than me. The intuition underlying such a move is that logic, as the pure expression of thinking, is not only operative in *subjective* forms of reasoning: since thinking itself issues in products—since it operates by intending a particular subject matter (a *Gegenstand*) independent of it and making this subject matter into something intelligible (an *Objekt*)<sup>11</sup>—there must also be fundamental forms through which it can make something *objectively* present to itself. These fundamental forms, described by the categories of ‘being’ and ‘essence,’ demonstrate how thinking, through its activity, is able to go beyond mere sensations and discern within them a self-subsistent whole via their conceptualization.<sup>12</sup> As such, these categories outline all the cognitive norms through which thinking, by thinking something through the resources that they offer, could empirically result in the discovery of a self-standing object. In Hegel’s nomenclature, there must be an Objective as well as Subjective Logic.

But in that any object so discovered would be only made present through language as that through which thinking takes place, the *Logic* is therefore a *meta-language about the all ways in which we can use language to give meaning to the world*, a discourse *about all the types of discourse that we may engage in*.<sup>13</sup> The primary thesis guiding the whole endeavor is

<sup>11</sup> On this important distinction, which is a central thematic of the *Logic*, see di Giovanni, introduction, xxxvi.

<sup>12</sup> Here I disagree with Pippin, who argues that only with ‘essence’ do we see the beginning of conceptual mediation. *It is conceptualization all the way down*. Cf. *Hegel’s Idealism*, 201 ff.

<sup>13</sup> In this paragraph, I paraphrase di Giovanni, introduction, xxxv.

that, starting from the logically simplest category that must be available to thinking in order for it to recognize, through its activity, something *as an object*—that is, *as distinct* from the subjective flow of sensations within a subject and *as contrary* to its arbitrary whim—we can proceed to enumerate an *exhaustive* list of all the basic categories at our disposal for conceptualizing a subject matter. We advance from an initial set of categories to an additional one by taking into consideration the specific way in which the norms that this initial set offers would still, on their own terms, render a subject matter relatively unintelligible and then by reflecting on what kind of further distinctions would have to be in play for what remains relatively unintelligible to become more fully intelligible. In the process of such a movement, we come to see, in formal outline, all the kinds of objects that we may, through language, come to encounter and be able to talk about. The guiding assumption is that if we can recognize an indeterminacy in the kind of object formally outlined by that initial set, then this additional set to which we move, even though we at the outset abstract from it, is already implicitly at play in the recognition of it as still relatively unintelligible.

In this way, we encounter three interconnected points concerning the methodology of the *Logic*. First, we see that each set of categories, by defining a specific type intelligibility that a subject matter—when conceptualized through its norms—can exhibit, schematically enacts *in the medium of pure reflection* a specific type of discourse of which we are capable *in real-life contexts*. It does this, however, in abstraction from the content that experience would give it. Second, in the movement from one set of categories to another, we therefore also move, but once again in the medium of pure reflection, from one type of discourse to another, ideally staging how the unintelligibility that would plague one kind of real-life discourse could only be resolved if it proved capable of being absorbed as a moment of a more concrete discourse that would have the categorial resources at its disposal to conceptualize what would be, in the first, still impervious to conceptualization. In this regard, the *Logic* establishes the *limits* of the various discourses spirit can embark on, the degree of transparency that we can expect to find in them, by investigating the very categories that provide the logic for these discourses. Third, although each set of categories, and by implication their corresponding

discourse, are in each case immanently analyzed, what emerges through this movement is, in fact, the *total* conditions of intelligibility that are *always already* at work alongside *any* given category. For to recognize how one set of categories would, on its own, render a subject matter relatively unintelligible not only implies that an additional set, which offers the norm for a more concrete intelligibility, is tacitly at play. It also implies that *all* sets are necessarily present in *any* particular instance of conceptualization insofar as this additional set likewise presupposes others. The progressive movement of the categories is, consequently, a retrogressive grounding (*SL*, 49, 750; *GW*, 21: 10, 12: 251). To put the matter differently, the 'system of pure reason' (*SL*, 29; *GW*, 21: 34) that the *Logic* describes is present in *every* facet of human experience *without remainder* because *any* discourse, whether it be that of sensing, desiring, thinking, or acting, implicitly refers to it as a whole *even when* it only makes explicit use of one small part thereof. Taking all three points together, we may therefore say, with Hegel, that we have entered into '*the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit*' (*SL*, 29; *GW*, 21: 34), with the stipulation that this exposition is the unveiling of the logical syntax—the ways in which the norms of thinking can be correctly and incorrectly combined to generate meaning—that makes possible the universe of meaning in which we dwell.

In all three points, the *Logic* is not unlike a language textbook. When we learn a language, we learn the rules (for instance, the tenses) that govern how we can speak when we wish to talk about certain things (simple present, continuous action, past, and so on). But these rules can tell us nothing about the infinite expanse of topics of conversation that we can have, even if they do make these conversations possible by formally outlining a type of object (something simply present, something continuously active, something past, and so on). Furthermore, as we go through a language textbook, we quickly discern how some rules are also only suited for particular topics (continuous action does not adequately convey the past or vice versa). This also implies that if we can only use certain rules, the kinds of conversations that we can have become highly limited or, in Hegelese, indeterminate (to anticipate the opening of the *Logic*, to only be able to use the simple present tense would prevent us from talking about the dynamic situations that we live day to day).

Last but not least, any given linguistic form we learn only truly comes into its own in the context of all the other forms always present in the system of a language (all the tenses and other rules in structural opposition to one another). All of these rules must be in place ‘before’ we can go about really talking, giving meaning to our experience.

## 5 The Logical Syntax of Discourse

Starting from the very least one must be able to say of something such that it could be an object of discourse, namely that it simply *is*, that it displays self-subsistence, the *Logic* begins by immanently analyzing this most basic category of ‘being’ in virtue of which such an intelligible presence could be linguistically or conceptually identified. It tries to determine whether this category is capable, on its own terms, of giving us resources to render any given subject matter fully intelligible, whether the *Objekt* that discourse could construct on its basis would give a satisfying account of its *Gegenstand*. But although ‘being’ does appear to identify the minimal condition to be met for objectivity—that something is imbued with the permanence required for a stable discourse—it does not, on its own, permit us to speak meaningfully about it. All we could say of a thought product produced with recourse to this category is that ‘It is.’ No content can be derived from such a statement; no genuine discourse can be constructed. Consequently, the kind of intelligible presence made possible by ‘being’ proves to be *logically indistinguishable* from that made possible by its opposite, ‘nothing.’

Hegel’s move is to unpack the conditions under which ‘being,’ as a category, could discursively generate meaning. To the degree that it, when taken as a reference to a pure, ‘self-possessing’ being, is not, we come to realize that the minimal quota to be met for intelligibility is if something adheres to the norm offered by ‘becoming.’<sup>14</sup> Whatever we encounter must *become* what it is through *abiding by itself* in face of any change

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<sup>14</sup> G.R.G. Mure says something similar when he speaks of the triad, which is first displayed in ‘becoming,’ as the ‘*minimale rationale*’ (*A Study of Hegel’s Logic* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950], 34).



or alteration that it may undergo. As such, a statement such as 'It is' is only intelligible as a moment of 'becoming.' The drastic consequence of these beginning moves is that *any* thinking that bases itself on the category of 'being' is insufficient for the establishment of objectivity in a linguistic sense. But included therein is a major strand of metaphysics—beginning with Parmenides, passing through Spinoza, and, for Hegel, still represented by the Schelling of the identity-philosophy—for which reality, when truly conceived, amounts to a monolithic being of pure presence. If we ascribe to such a metaphysical worldview, then discursive knowledge is rendered impossible for the simple reason that all there is is this pure presence of which we can only say 'It is,' a statement that can have no sayable content. The *Logic* thereby advances a first metaphysical commitment: that reality cannot be a static One, an eternally complete substance, or an absolute identity, that negation or negativity and all that goes along with it—change, time, and difference—are an irreducible part of reality. But it does so *transcendentally* by showing how, unless being is conceived of as *in becoming* and *that becoming as serious and not illusionary*, we cannot explain the condition of the possibility of the discursive knowledge that we do have.<sup>15</sup>

The precise logical issue that now emerges in the *Logic* is the kinds of categories that must be at our disposal for an object to be fully intelligible in its becoming. In the categories of 'quality' that now explicitly come into play, it is shown how, if proving to be one set of qualia and then another while still exhibiting a coherent, recognizable qualitative core (that is, a fundamental gestalt) through this movement, an object would gain determinate, discernable content of its own that permits it to be picked out and spoke about. However, the categories of 'quality' still harbor indeterminacy. For although qualia may coalesce together in varying ways to produce unities of differing degrees of self-subsistence, these determinations, by definition rhapsodically coming into and out of existence, could just as easily *undo* as *maintain* the qualitative core of an object. And without any longstanding stability in the objects of experience, there can be no discourse about them—discourse about intrinsically fleeting objects cannot say much besides the demonstratives 'this!'

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<sup>15</sup> di Giovanni, introduction, liii.

or 'that' (*SL*, 91; *GW*, 21: 105) without any guarantee that these would allow us to identify their reference, for the latter is likely to disappear through the flux of its qualia before a speaker could even utter them. Hegel's logically motivated insight is that any discourse based on the givens of the senses, the logical presuppositions of which are here elaborated, is extremely limited: with qualitative determinations coming and going with no discernable rhyme or reason, any objects that we would here encounter would lack concrete subsistence.

The next logical move requires us to recognize that the indeterminacy of the discourse of 'quality'—the inability to find a *qualitative* principle through which the qualia of an object could be held together—could only be removed to the extent that an object, in becoming what it is, would be able to shift the stress from *what* it qualitatively is at this or that moment to a unity that *persists* despite this rhapsodic flux. The categories of 'quantity' render explicit the norms by which such a unity could be identified. They define how an object, now taken as composed of quanta indifferent to the object's qualia, could be both continuous and discrete with itself in a way that is, from the very outset, governed by a *formal* principle. No matter what parts we encounter, these parts, *precisely as parts of a single object*, would only be parts in virtue of their place in its unity. Particularly in the categories of 'measure,' where these quanta are paired with one another in complex ratios dictated by mathematical operators, we see this new type of self-containment most clearly: Since any change in one quantum would require a change in the other quanta with which it is internally bound by a formal principle, such an object would now control its own becoming. In a way counterintuitive to natural consciousness, the discourse of the senses are thereby shown to be fully intelligible only if the qualitative unities it encounters can be construed as mere moments of more concrete formal unities like the ones envisaged by the discourse of mathematics.

The categories of 'measure' provide a norm through which each determination in an object would allude to a principle that governs it. Nevertheless, a certain indeterminacy remains. While they do indeed determine the possible range of determinations in an object, such a *formal* principle is still unable to tell us which determinations we would in fact find. At most, it lets us, taking one determination arbitrarily, predict

which others would then be present thanks to the ratios between quanta dictated by the formal principle. In this regard, any intelligibility that we would construct from a subject matter would depend on the givenness of this subject matter itself. We may comprehend *how* an object is what it is, but not *why* it has the specific configurations that it does at any particular point of its own becoming.<sup>16</sup> Any discourse of this type, however, would be in principle relatively opaque, for the object, *by just happening to have these determinations rather than others*, would display an ineluctable facticity impervious to our comprehension. The discourse of mathematics, despite its complexity, is therefore for Hegel still abstract in terms of what it can succeed in rendering intelligible.

The next logical move is the recognition that we can only remove the indeterminacy of the discourse of 'measure'—its inability to account for the movement of determinations in an object—if the principle governing these determinations and the determinations themselves no longer fall apart. The categories of 'essence' that now enter on the scene thus supply the norm in contrast to which those of 'measure' were recognizable as still abstract. They articulate how both sides of an object can *refer to one another without remainder* such that the object should leave no question concerning its existence left unanswered. On the one hand, a principle of determination (for example, the 'law') can only be a full-fledged principle if it proves to be that which is responsible for the *entire* movement of determinations under its sway. Any independence of the latter vis-à-vis it would weaken its explanatory power. On the other hand, these determinations (for example, the 'world of appearance') must simultaneously show, in their own inner dynamic, that they only come-to-be and cease-to-be by means of a principle that they assume, thereby regulating *themselves* to the status of mere products of said principle ('law' and 'world of appearance' are hereby intertwined).

As such, the categories of 'essence' provide the logic of the discourse of the understanding. They describe 'pre-eminently the categories of metaphysics and the sciences in general' (*EL*, 177, §114 Remark; *GW*, 20: 145), those which attempt to go beyond the things of experience by demonstrating their origins or grounds in a greater reality that contains them as

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<sup>16</sup> Mure, *A Study of Hegel's Logic*, 79.

mere moments: namely, nature, the basis of whose conceptual discovery is now furnished. In short, these categories show why we are driven to ask *big questions*. Indeterminacy as it now arises is measured by the degree to which an explanatory principle of determination, as formally outlined by a category, is, when immanently analyzed, able to bring its determinations into an intelligible whole, for despite the fact that each side of the object is now taken as intrinsically referring to the other, thus creating a self-sufficient explanatory framework, this reference is nonetheless still to something minimally external. For example, 'law' articulates the fundamental matrix through which the manifold richness of 'appearance' contains recognizable patterns. As such, 'law' exists immanently in the domain for which it legislates. However, because one side the object now formally outlined is of stable structure and the other of varying content, there is, in the intelligibility so envisaged, always an element of opaqueness as to how they are connected.

Hegel's strategy here is to introduce, bit by bit, distinctions that aim to logically dissolve the immediacy of the terms in question. This entails elaborating a logical syntax in virtue of which the *reference* between the terms becomes absorbed into the *relationship* that binds them together *by generating them in the first place*, whereby each comes to intrinsically imply the other without remainder thanks to that relation's productivity.<sup>17</sup> After a discussion of the norms offered by the categories of 'the absolute,' in which that relation is recognizable in its pure self-relation, the modal categories, in which it is recognizable in its movement, and even 'substance' taken in a Spinozistic sense as consisting of attributes and modes, this new intelligibility is brought to its head with the category of 'reciprocity.' Here we discover that, if describable in terms of the equal push and pull of action and reaction as carried out by self-subsistent, causally active substances, an object should lose any facticity it otherwise would display. For it to have the specific characteristics that it does in an intelligible manner, previous actions to which these characteristics are the response have to be articulable, and, similarly, for these prior events to

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<sup>17</sup> George di Giovanni, 'Hegel's Anti-Sponzism: The Transition to Subjective Logic and the End of Classical Metaphysics,' in *Hegel's Theory of the Subject*, ed. David Gray Carlson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 34.

have come-into-being, different, even more ontogenetically past actions to which they were the response have be articulable, and so on *ad infinitum*, such that this self-unfolding chain, composed of a homogeneous, self-contained structure, is, when conceptualized, what makes a subject matter fully intelligible. It is thus only to the extent that the story of an object can be absorbed *into the story of a dynamic system in becoming that produces it as a part of its life* that it is opaque or transparent.

## 6 Proving the Opaqueness of Nature Logically

With this final category, the Objective Logic comes to a close. It has examined, in formal outline (as proper to a work of logic), all the ways in which thinking, by making an independent subject matter present to itself, *could* conceptually construct a self-standing object. But whether we, in our endeavor to render the world meaningful through discourse, *actually* discover objects that correspond to the norms of intelligibility that the Objective Logic *formally* outlines, is something that the *Logic* itself cannot decide. Only *real-life* contexts, dictated by the subject matters that we come across, can. If the categories of metaphysics here re-emerge at all, it is only because the Objective Logic has been able to reclaim them for its own as moments of a philosophy of language as first philosophy, as that which explains how we can have an intelligible world at all: '[t]he objective logic thus takes the place rather of the former metaphysics which was supposed to be the scientific edifice of the world as constructed by thoughts alone' (*SL*, 42; *GW*, 21: 48). Nevertheless, by describing the norms by which we can recognize objects—the kinds of intelligible presences that we can *anticipate* as factually existing in the world—the purely logical indeterminacies the Objective Logic brings to light in these norms have *more than formal reach*. We come to realize that any discourse that bases itself upon these norms would encounter the same problems in the objects it discovers, but now articulated in the details of unpredictable empirical content. Consequently, the opaqueness that the Objective Logic charts *in thinking the categories* also charts, albeit in a different register, the opaqueness that certain kinds of *really existing subject matters would exhibit if discovered and made intelligible from the*

*standpoints of the discourses for which it furnishes the logical syntax.* For instance, while ‘quality’ cannot tell me what kinds of qualities I might—or even if I will at all—encounter in my experience (say, the fruit-forward aromas of my morning coffee), it does let me know that, if I do run into any qualia, they would display similar issues as the ones formally outlined by the norm of such a discourse (these aromas are quite fleeting and therefore difficult to speak intelligibly about, unless I am able to demonstrate that they emerge, as accidental qualities, in certain conditions dictated by, say, biochemical traits on the basis of which my propositions do not risk being arbitrary).

The consequence of this claim is not to be underestimated. If here, at the height of the Objective Logic, a new indeterminacy were to be found, then the whole realm of nature, the discourse of which the categories of ‘essence’ makes possible, would itself be shown to be *metaphysically opaque no matter what nature shows itself to be when we turn to it*. And we *do* find a new indeterminacy. Although ‘reciprocity’ makes recognizable a self-unfolding chain, this structure, although self-contained, upon closer investigation cannot *fully* contain its own becoming. Given that for every action there is an equal reaction, an object becomes intelligible *only* to the extent that there is an ontogenetically past series of intrinsically interconnected events that renders it inevitable. But insofar as any member of that series will *by definition* refer back to another member, the chain that is hereby constructed cannot, logically speaking, come to a close, and without any possible systemic closure, there is always the sense that this or that occurred *just because* it occurred that way. Nothing prevents the causal chain of nature from having formed itself otherwise *except the fact that it did form itself so*. Even if we suppose that the chain of events *does* have an actual Beginning that sets the rest in motion (for example, God or the Big Bang), the logical point that Hegel drives home is that such a Beginning would appear *to us* as a simple stopgap. In terms of the structure of the chain, itself characterized by the openness of becoming, there is *no good reason* to stop it here or there (nothing prevents us from asking *why* God created the world or *what* occurred prior to the Big Bang, or entertaining that these things happened differently). As such, the categories of ‘essence’ indirectly testify to how nature can be, at most, a mere agglomeration of interconnected

events, a potentially endless repetition of one thing after another that risks, for us, appearing as pointless, as without any inborn rationality.<sup>18</sup> Whatever forms of objectivity that we may discover out there, they will always remain unsatisfying vis-à-vis the complete intelligibility we expect to find embodied in them.

## 7 The Medium of Conceptualization

Since we cannot find complete intelligibility in the thought products we produce in our search for meaning, the question emerges as to why we look for complete intelligibility in the first place. If we have exhausted all the ways in which discourse can construe an object *out there*, this intimates that the expectation for logically complete intelligibility must be a side effect *of the very process of conceptualization itself*, that the latter demands a transparent relationship between the moments of the concepts it constructs (its various *Objekte*) that the things of experience and nature (their corresponding *Gegenstände*) cannot, because they are in material becoming, display. The categories of ‘the concept’—the pure structure of which is ‘universality,’ ‘particularity,’ and ‘singularity’ and is that upon which any conceptual construct must be based—therefore make explicit the norms by which the unintelligibility still present in ‘reciprocity’ is recognizable in the first place. This move requires of us that we leave behind the Objective Logic, an account of the various products that the activity of thinking can issue in via object-intending categories, and, passing over into the Subjective Logic, give an account of the very medium of conceptualization through which these products are produced.

With the transition to Subjective Logic, we enter the terrain covered by traditional logic. Hegel’s thesis is that the pure structure of ‘the concept’ already contains within it the forms of judgment and rules of inference, all of which mutually support one another in a logically necessary manner. For instance, even the most basic form of affirmative judgment (‘S is U’) must implicitly employ the form of a negative judgment (‘S is not U’): For any affirmative judgment to say what it *de facto* means, it must be

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Harris, ‘Lecture Notes,’ 152.

assumed that a strict identification of the singular with the universal is not asserted, which it, by its own resources, cannot guarantee. Such a deduction continues until the entire set of norms behind conceptualization has been exhaustively deduced. This entails that the moments of 'the concept' are not only *deeply interrelated*. More drastically, they constitute a perfectly determined whole *without any irrational residue*. This has two further consequences: first, that for *any* use of a concept, judgment, or inference, the *total* set of norms that makes up the medium of conceptualization must be at work in order to say anything meaningful at all; second, that some kind of knowledge, at least unconscious, of these norms and the whole that they constitute must be *presupposed* in any such use, for otherwise *no* effective use of a concept, judgment, or inference could occur in the first place.

The net result of these analyses is that when thinking constructs an intelligible object from a subject matter *out there*, it cannot, by definition, fully explain it like it can always, in principle, explain its own conceptual medium without remainder. But this 'failure' is not due to a limitation on its behalf. The issue is that the medium of conceptualization is destined to place demands for intelligibility upon the things of experience and nature that they themselves simply *cannot own up to*. They are, as it were, forced to play a losing game as soon as we begin to think about them, for their material becoming can never be self-transparently determined in the way 'the concept' is to itself. To put it differently, it is only *in the discourse of logic* that we can expect to find a completely intelligible presence that would satisfy reason, for it is the pure logical syntax of thinking itself that creates an impossible desire: the desire to see *out there* in our conceptual constructs of the real-life universe the kind of intelligibility *already implicitly known within the medium of conceptualization* and that is, therefore, the test for the intelligibility of all other things.<sup>19</sup> Here, *and only here*, do we find a subject matter (*Gegenstand*) that can be made fully objective (into a self-sufficient *Objekt*).

This is *not* to deny that the principles by which nature is *de facto* governed do display a certain degree of intrinsic intelligibility. It is merely to

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<sup>19</sup> Harris makes a similar point: 'Compared with it [the concept], ordinary concrete things are only abstractions (just like their representative concepts 'in our minds'])' ('Lecture Notes,' 172).



claim that, vis-à-vis the rationality of ‘the concept,’ these principles have to appear *to us* as weak in determining what was, is, or will be. In short, what the *Logic* proves is that our quest for meaning and what Hegel refers to as the ‘impotence of nature’<sup>20</sup> to uphold conceptual distinctions go hand in hand. But we should be careful in making this claim. Nature has a self-contained life of its own. It does not care whether its becoming meets our rational expectations or not. On its own terms, there is *nothing* deficient or lacking in it. Nonetheless, as soon as it is refracted in the medium of conceptualization it becomes, as it were, a *scandal* to thinking, which desires a self-transparent reason to be present in all things in its search for meaning. Consequently, it is *we who make nature impotent*: because we can always imagine it having been otherwise—unlike the norms behind conceptualization, which cannot, for Hegel, be other than they are—we *write contingency into it*.<sup>21</sup>

## 8 Spirit’s Break from Nature

The insurmountable disconnect that the *Logic* places between our demands for rational self-transparency and nature has one further metaphysical consequence. It proclaims that it is only in the products of a being whose life would be dictated by these very demands that thinking may find a self-contained whole similar to the one present in the system of pure reason. But we know such a being. It is *we—spirit*—the only being on this earth capable of logic. As logical beings, we are driven to bring in increasingly fine distinctions to make what we encounter intelligible, condemned to wonder about the meaning of the world and our

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<sup>20</sup> *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature*, vol. 1, trans. M. J. Petry (London: Humanities Press, 1970) 215, §250 Remark; *GW*, 20: 240.

<sup>21</sup> Most metaphysical readings are, in my opinion, unable to give an adequate explanation of the status of the ‘impotence of nature.’ How can being, as self-determining reason, lead to what is irrational? Houlgate dodges the dilemma in *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic*. For his part, Beiser recognizes the difficulty, arguing that Hegel has run into an intractable problem concerning the proposed *objective* status of contingency (see *Hegel*, 76 ff.): If there are truly things unexplainable by self-determining reason, then there is an outside to the absolute. Interestingly, no such issues arise as soon as if it is *our* rationality that leads to contingency: While nature may be largely irrational for us, this in no way affects the ‘absolute’ status of the logical forms of human rationality.

place in it. 'Condemned' is an apt expression in this context because such a search is, if left to the level of mere nature, bound to lead to rational disappointment. Whether we go about it by the senses, mathematics, or the empirical and philosophical sciences of nature, we cannot hope to discover a presence as perfectly intelligible as the very medium that supports our conceptual practices of meaning generation. Consequently, we can only construct an intellectually satisfying discourse if we turn our attention from the life of nature to the life of the political, artistic, religious, and philosophical institutions that we, as spirit, bring forth. Being a product of our thinking, these institutions, which constitute the basis of human history as something distinctively human, should, even if only unconsciously, adhere to logical norms in the way mere nature never can.

However, this insurmountable disconnect thereby entails that it is our rationality that institutes a *break* between nature and spirit. In this way, Hegel's *Logic* demonstrates *in a purely logical register* how, in virtue of our capacity for logic, we must give a meaning to our existence *independent* from whatever meaning it has as a mere part of nature. Whatever ties to nature we factually bear are therefore rendered *accidental* vis-à-vis our rationality and its products.<sup>22</sup> More precisely, they are regulated to the realm of the *pre-historical* in light of the new form of life for which 'the concept' supplies the fundamental matrix. For us, there is therefore a *subjectively* insurmountable gap between nature and ourselves, between the environment that we live in thanks to the particular set of instincts and drives given to us by our biological body and the greater cosmos whose forms and laws guide all material becoming, and the significance that we freely bestow upon our lives through our institutions. As soon as we enter into the universe of meaning, *wholly new possibilities for existence, wholly new motivations, emerge, forcing us to leave (our) nature behind because, in virtue of our capacity for logic, we demand convincing reasons for everything we do and thus create interpretative systems that inform our actions.* This is another of the principal reasons why, according to Hegel, logic in the strictest sense of that term is *never* metaphysically innocent. In describing the conditions of the possibility of meaning, we are also describing the

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<sup>22</sup> Harris makes the same point: 'The human community lives in the world of its own interpretation, and this decides even what counts as "fact" (*Dasein*) for it' (*Hegel's Ladder*, vol. 2, 726).

ontological *hiatus* that separates us from the world of nature, a *hiatus* that logic itself is responsible for by *itself* supplying the index of what counts as intellectually satisfying, as an adequate reason.

It is on this note that we can raise the question of what remains of Hegel's *Logic*. Not only does it present us with a complex theory of semantics whose account of the relationship among logic, language, and thinking deserves attention in its own right and is capable of holding its own in both analytic and continental circles. With its identification of logic and language with the *metaphysical* foundation of spirit, it also develops a novel response to the relationship between first and second nature. Taken globally, there are two major trends to tackle their relationship or non-relationship in contemporary philosophy. On the one hand, we have those who desire to comprehend mind and its product culture 'materially.' This leads either to an elimination of the latter as something illusionary (for example, the Churchlands and Thomas Metzinger) or an attempt to expand the agency of matter, thereby diminishing any divide between them (for example, Jane Bennett and Karen Barad). On the other hand, we encounter positions that proclaim the irreducibility of mind. Some argue that consciousness as such must be an ontologically autonomous property with laws of its own (such as David Chalmers) and others still that its emergence must be completely inexplicable (ranging Colin McGinn from to Quentin Meillassoux). The *Logic*, precisely as a work in logic, perhaps unexpectedly adds a new option that can restructure the coordinates of the debate by arguing for the *simultaneous* continuity and discontinuity of nature with spirit in a way that avoids scientific obscurity and mystery, while allowing for the irreducibility of spirit.

The argument for this simultaneous continuity and discontinuity can be summarized as follows. In a first moment, Hegel describes how the categories of thinking do their work, as drives, instinctively. But drives and instincts are parts of nature. Our capacity for logic is, in a strong sense, therefore *a product of nature itself*. This is because, according to Hegel, rationality is just *one* form of biological life among many, even if it is a highly unique form capable of creating things no longer fully comprehensible in terms of nature alone. Nevertheless, *as a form of life* it can still be a suitable topic for the particular physical sciences. Indeed, Hegel himself spends considerable effort in his *Philosophy of Spirit*

reconstructing the ‘anthropological’ and ‘psychological’ sciences of his own time (their version, as it were, of ‘human physiology’ and ‘neuroscience’) to show precisely the way in which nature provides the material conditions of possibility of spirit. There is, by consequence, nothing in principle obscure about the transition to spirit *objectively* speaking, that is, from the formal standpoint of sciences of nature. Nature creates us, and we can describe how.

In a second moment, however, Hegel also advocates against any kind of naturalistic elimination of spirit. Even if our capacity for logic has natural origins, there can be no convincing picture given *subjectively* concerning the transition from nature to spirit. At the exact moment spirit arises, something comes into existence that *must* elude the standpoint of the particular physical sciences. For as soon as ‘the concept’ emerges *within nature*, an ontological *hiatus* arises as if ex nihilo in that ‘the concept’ outstrips its natural antecedents.<sup>23</sup> With it, *we* move from a *physical cosmos* of material becoming to a *universe of meaning* with its own self-legislating normativity, thus bringing forth an experiential gap between first and second nature, spirit and its pre-history, that can never be surmounted, because the world of spirit has its own rules that cannot be found in nature. It is, as such, entirely coherent on its own terms. And we know this with the absolute certainty and transparency afforded to us by logic such that there is nothing mysterious about how spirit comes into its own over and above nature. As soon as we can think as natural beings, we become something more than our physical nature.

What Hegel’s *Logic* can teach us today, therefore, is that matters of human spirit cannot be so easily answered by the physical sciences. To put it in a more contemporary way, we can never adequately solve the ‘hard problem’ of consciousness through their methods. Even if we were to fully explain consciousness in a natural register, this solution would still never be able to explain to us why we are driven to interpret our existence in the way that we do, to live the lives that we live. In virtue of spirit, something irreducibly new asserts itself in the fabric of the world, namely a natural creature whose quest for meaning forces it to bring

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<sup>23</sup> Of course, for Hegel spirit, as a form of nature that transcends nature, does not emerge in an *evolutionary* sense.

forth a world *that has a structure of its own making*, a world whose rationality can only be, as a product of thinking, investigated *internally* in light of its inner dynamic. We may today all be default naturalists who look to physics and biology for all the tools to understand the grand mysteries of life, but there is a point where these lines of enquiry do not satisfy our deepest urges for self-comprehension. We must instead turn to politics, art, religion, philosophy, and the terrain of human history in which they develop as something highly unique. That is, we must turn to the domain of the humanities, for here and here alone will we come to understand our own existence and its meaning in that there is always something irreducibly spiritual, in Hegel's sense of that word, about who we are. By simply exploring the logical conditions of the possibility of the universe of meaning in which we dwell, and showing how this creates its own distinct motivations for intelligibility because it is founded upon a self-contained, self-justifying system of pure reason, Hegel thus develops an innovative account of the autonomy of spirit over nature that might be capable of inspiring new syntheses between the physical sciences and humanities.

# 9

## Lack and the Spurious Infinite: Towards a New Reading of Hegel's Philosophy of Nature

Wes Furlotte

### 1 Introduction

We can historically trace the almost unanimous rejection of Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* at least as far back as Schelling's scathing criticisms, in and around 1833–1834, regarding what he saw as the unbridgeable void separating the register of Hegel's *Logic* from the domain of nature.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Schelling's *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), especially the section on Hegel, 134–160; *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, division I, vol. 10, ed. Karl Friedrich August Schelling (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J. G. Cotta, 1856–61), 126–164. Of this chasm, Schelling writes: '[Hegel says] the Idea ...] in the infinite freedom, in the "truth of itself, resolves to release itself as nature, or in the form of being-other, from itself." This expression "release"—the Idea releases nature—is one of the strangest [...] expressions behind which this philosophy retreats at difficult points [...] It is a very awkward point at which Hegel's philosophy has arrived here [...] a nasty broad ditch [...]' (155; I/10: 153–154). See also Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1993), chapter 6, for an overview of the significant tensions between the two. Consider also Manfred Frank, 'Schelling's Critique of Hegel and the Beginning of Marxian Dialectics,' trans. Joseph P. Lawrence, *Idealistic Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 19.3 (1989): 251–268.

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Feuerbach developed his own unique variation of dissent by claiming that ‘the absolute’ is nothing other than consciousness’ self-alienation.<sup>2</sup> Marx and Engels developed their set of criticisms of Hegel’s writings on nature by elaborating, as some commentators have argued, on the criticisms first generated by Schelling. Marx and Engels, in attempting to counter what they saw as the Hegelian system’s *barring* of dialectical-historical developments within the natural register, attempted to interpret scientific findings and phenomena in terms of a distinct dialectical materialism, arguing that there could be no real sense of history that was not already an outgrowth of natural history. Therefore, part of their objective of developing a *complete* world outlook—that is, one not only based on philosophy and political economy—means that ‘they inevitably had to arrive at the necessity [...] of] generalizing in philosophical terms the main achievements of natural science, to disclose the dialectical character of the development of nature and thereby show the universality of the basic laws of materialist dialectics.’<sup>3</sup> Insofar as Hegel’s system insisted on the diremption between the categories of thought, on the one hand, and their absence in the natural register, on the other, it was caught in irremediable dilemmas. Indeed, the essential problem, for the Marxian criticism, consists in the fact that Hegel forced the laws of thought into nature instead of deriving them from the natural register. In this sense, Hegel’s system, as Marx and Engels argue, requires radical inversion.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Feuerbach, ‘The Contradiction in the Speculative Doctrine of God,’ in *19th-Century Philosophy*, ed. Patrick L. Gardiner (New York: Collier-MacMillan, 1969), see 246–50. Here we get a sense of Feuerbach’s criticism of Hegel’s speculative philosophy insofar as the latter situates both humans and nature *within* the processes constituting the Absolute whereas, pace Hegel, Feuerbach maintains that the Absolute needs to be understood as objectified (alienated) human consciousness, hence, secondary.

<sup>3</sup> See Frederick Engels, Frederick, preface to *Anti-Dühring and Dialectics of Nature*, trans. Emile Burns and Clemens Dutt, vol. 25 of *Collected Works*, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (New York: International Publishers, 1987), XIX.

<sup>4</sup> For systematic treatments of Marx’s conception of nature, see, for example, Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: NLB, 1971); see also John L. Stanley, ‘Marx’s Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature,’ *Science and Society* 61.4 (Winter 1997/1998): 449–473; see also Zhang Wenxi’s ‘The Concept of nature and historicism in Marx,’ *Front. Philos. China* 4 (2006): 630–42.

For entirely different reasons, Popper dismissed Hegel's writings on nature. So did Russell.<sup>5</sup> It is no exaggeration to maintain that this line of rejection has continued until the present. For instance, current strands of speculative thought that assign priority to mathematics in terms of access to the Real still view Hegelian thought as suspicious (take Meillassoux<sup>6</sup>). Even the recent resurgence of interest in German Idealism and Romanticism in terms of *Naturphilosophie* has led one of its more recognized figures, Iain Hamilton Grant,<sup>7</sup> to downplay the very possibility that Hegel's thought might contribute to such a project.

Even in turning to those who continue to study Hegel's work, we find that his philosophy of nature has been largely ignored.<sup>8</sup> But this disregard is highly problematic. Despite Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* having been committed to the oblivion reserved for the excesses of metaphysical speculation, it nevertheless remains clear that Hegel himself saw it as a fundamental dimension of his final system. Insofar as the free, self-reflexive activity of spirit must take itself up *within*, and therefore also *against*, the natural register, his thought presents us with a clear demand that such an upsurge of free auto-actualization be given a conceptual rendering within the coordinates of a speculative system. We must show the two registers are, in some sense, conceptually coherent and, ultimately, interconnected if not explicitly complimentary. Hegel's mature thought, therefore, remains fundamentally committed to the post-Kantian developments in critical philosophy strikingly pursued in the frenetic work of the young Schelling: Nature must show itself as open to the possibility of freedom's emergence, and such an emergence must be systematically articulated if spirit, as a sphere of free auto-actualization, is to be established at all.

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<sup>5</sup> See Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel, Freedom, Truth and History* (New York: Blackwell, 2005), 106 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (New York: Continuum, 2008), Meillassoux sees Hegel's idealism as exemplifying 'correlationism' (chapter 1, 5 ff.). He also challenges the viability of Hegel's nature-philosophy in the status it assigns to contingency (80 and n7).

<sup>7</sup> Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* (New York: Continuum, 2008). Grant develops the differences between Schelling and Hegel regarding nature early (15 ff.). He further develops Hegel's misreading of Schelling later (172 ff.).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Terry Pinkard's *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 562.



Concomitantly, Hegel saw it as crucial, as Kant had already ambivalently and problematically shown in the third *Critique*, that some balance must be struck between Newtonian-mechanistic explanations of natural phenomena, on the one hand, and teleological explanations of various related phenomena, on the other, in order to bridge the gap between nature and spirit. With such a project, however, Hegel also sought to avoid all 'mystical conceptions of nature' or any 'restoration of premodern dogmatism.'<sup>9</sup>

Given the significance Hegel assigns to the philosophy of nature within his final system, and in direct conflict with its scornful reception, I take the risk of returning to this obscure and much maligned dimension of his thought. My objective is to discern the fundamental features of what we might call a distinctly *Hegelian* philosophy of nature and then consider his writings on culture and logic in light of those features. All too often, if it is paid any mind at all, it is read as a derivative of Schellingian or Romantic innovations, that is, as pursuing their concern to establish the rational *unity* of nature. I will show that such a move not only serves to obscure Hegel's uniqueness, but also is, more drastically, completely mistaken. In this sense, the question becomes: What would it mean to take this element of the final system seriously? Can a distinctly Hegelian *Naturphilosophie* contribute to our contemporary philosophical world's (re-)emergent need for a speculative-critical metaphysics?

My central thesis is that Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* demonstrates what I call 'nature's constitutive lack,' or what Hegel at times characterizes as nature's 'impotence [*Ohnmacht*],' how it 'gives rise to monstrosities [*ist Monstrositäten ausgesetzt*].'<sup>10</sup> I contend that such a lack follows with precision from 'the preliminary concept of nature' that Hegel presents in the introduction to his *Philosophy of Nature*. It reads: '[N]ature

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<sup>9</sup> Pinkard, *Hegel*, 563.

<sup>10</sup> *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *PN*], vol. 1, ed. and trans. M.J. Petry (London: Humanities Press, 1969), 215, §250 Remark, and vol. 3, 179, §370 Remark (§368 in 3rd edition); *GW*, 20: 240 and 369. Citations of Hegel refer to the pagination of the English translation, followed by the numbered paragraph or paragraphs of the original in brackets, in turn followed by the pagination of the *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968–), except when a text is not a part of the latter. References to the critical edition are given by the abbreviation *GW*, volume and page number.

has yielded itself as the idea in the form of *otherness*. Since the *idea* is therefore the negative of itself, or external to itself, nature is not merely external relative to this idea [...] but is embodied as nature in the determination of *externality*' (PN, vol. 1, 205, §247; GW, 20: 237). The emphasis Hegel places on 'otherness' and 'exteriority' in this passage is highly significant, although rarely taken seriously. If we take it literally, as we should, it proclaims that nature *is* (metaphysically) exteriority: rather than being external just in relation to the idea or conceptual thought, it is, on the contrary, self-external or externality *all the way down*. There are two important consequences that follow from this 'preliminary concept.' First, nature must begin with the other of conceptuality, conceptuality being the subject matter of the *Science of Logic*. This pushes us towards thinking Hegel's position in terms of a fundamental materialism. Second, even living organisms, which Hegel characterizes as the 'highest to which nature drives in its determinate being' (PN, vol. 1, 209, §248 Remark; GW, 20: 238), the closest that nature comes to spirit (and which thus must play an important role in accounting for the emergence of the latter *within* nature), must be thought in terms of nature's exteriority. If this is the case, then the animal organism must also be thought in terms that pose a question mark, if not a problem, to its status as interiorized, that is, as a form of free, self-reflexive subjectivity. Animality, therefore, is a perennial confrontation with nature's overwhelming externality.

By focusing on this tension in what follows, I will seek to explore how Hegel's account of animality allows us come to terms, more generally, with the philosophical consequences of his *Naturphilosophie*. In a first moments, I concentrate on his speculative account of the biological drives and impulses that propel the animal into the world. This may be, on first glance, a counterintuitive starting point because the animal organism appears to display itself, on Hegel's reading, as fully interiorized and therefore as having overcome the problem of exteriority as it pertains to, say, the register of mechanics, where there is, to put it bluntly, just one thing thoughtlessly banging into another and in which, therefore, no free auto-actualization is conceivable. Nevertheless, I show that the animal's constitutive hunger perpetually collapses *outward* and so re-instantiates the problem of the radical exteriority characteristic of Hegelian nature.

Then, in a second and third moment, I show how the animal's biological economy is structured in terms of negation on three interconnected planes: assimilation (eating), reproduction (copulation), and death (violence and natural death). In all three of these phenomena, the animal is perpetually given over to external determinations, poured out into what Hegel describes as nature's 'spurious infinite' (*PN*, vol. 3, 176, §369 [§370 in 3rd edition]; *GW*, 20: 270). In a concluding moment, I argue that it is this *over*-determination by way of exteriority that establishes the fundamental lack operative in the natural register and is therefore highly useful for providing the groundwork for a new reading of Hegelian nature.

Before we begin, a word of clarification: This 'split' does not entail a collapse into a Cartesian or Sartrean dualism that asserts that the realm of nature is devoid of conceptuality. Instead, it is to argue for a form of 'unstable minimalism' in terms of rational metaphysical determinations by describing how the natural register generates minimal expressions of conceptuality, how it lacks the more sophisticated material instantiations of conceptual activity that we find within the coordinates of spirit (*Geist*)—political institutions, works of art, religious practices, and even philosophical texts—and, when considered in terms of these, is therefore deficient. The overarching objective of my reconstruction is to generate a distinct reading of Hegel's maligned nature-philosophy in order to discern its main features. In turn, it aims to explore alternative visions of Hegel's final system and the way in which its main parts—nature, spirit, and logic—intertwine. In this sense, it challenges several well-established readings of Hegel's philosophy of nature, which view the latter as fundamentally rational, coherent, unfolding by conceptual necessity.<sup>11</sup> Simultaneously, it attempts to clear a space in which to consider what, if anything, Hegel's thought might offer our contemporary world and its (re)emerging concern with speculative ontology, the problem of nature, and how anything resembling subjectivity and freedom might emerge from the immanent movements of a material register.

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Allison Stone, *Petrified Intelligence: Nature in Hegel's Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005).

## 2 Nature's First Fulfilled Ideality or Negativity and the Problem of Lack

Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* purports to track the idea in the form of otherness (*PN*, vol. 1, 205, §247; *GW*, 20: 237), moving from the most abstract form of exteriority, as in the case of space and time, towards emergent complexity and inwardization, as in the final stage of organics. In total, the speculative analysis spans the three sections of the mechanical, the physical, and the organic, culminating in an account of the life processes constituting the animal organism. To substantiate my central thesis concerning nature's lack, I will restrict my analysis to the processes constituting the animal organism. For if it proves to be the case that the most complex form of the natural register is repeatedly beset with the problem of exteriority, we will be forced to conclude that this lack permeates the entirety of the Hegelian conception of nature—from its most minimal determinations in the mechanical register through to its most complex in the organic realm, and so constitutes one of its defining features.

The analysis of organics begins with an initial sketch of the auto-differentiating-and-unifying processes Hegel identifies as operative within the body of the living organism and which he captures through the category of *life*.<sup>12</sup> Concerning this development, which the speculative analysis shows to be dependent on the forms of materiality in the mechanical and physical registers that dialectically precede it, he writes:

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<sup>12</sup>For the relation between Kant, Hegel, and the issue of teleology in nature, see Daniel O. Dahlstrom, 'Hegel's Appropriation of Kant's Account of Teleology in Nature,' in *Hegel and the Philosophy of Nature*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 167–189; see Allen Hance, 'The Art of Nature: Hegel and the Critique of Judgment,' *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 6.1 (1998): 37–65; similarly, see James Kreines, 'The Logic of Life: Hegel's Philosophical Defense of Teleological Explanation of Living Beings,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 344–77; see too Francesca Micheline, 'Hegel's Notion of Natural Purpose,' *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 43 (2012), 133–39. For a sense of the way in which Hegel's teleology strikes affinities with Whitehead's 'process philosophy,' see George R. Lucas, 'A Re-Interpretation of Hegel's Philosophy of Nature,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22.1 (January 1984): 103–113; see also George R. Lucas, ed., *Hegel and Whitehead: Contemporary Perspectives on Systematic Philosophy* (New York: SUNY Press, 1986).

The real nature of the body's totality constitutes the infinite process in which individuality determines itself as the particularity or finitude which it also negates, and returns into itself by reestablishing itself at the end of the process as the beginning. Consequently, this totality is an elevation into the first [*erste*] ideality of nature. It is however a *fulfilled* [*erfüllte*] and negative unity, which by relating itself to itself, has become essentially *self-centred* and *subjective*. In this way, the idea has come into existence, an initial immediacy, *life* [*Die Idee ist hiermit zur Existenz gekommen, zunächst zur unmittelbaren, zum Leben*]. (PN, vol. 3, 9, §337; GW, 20: 344; translation modified, see note)<sup>13</sup>

In the bodies constituting organic life, we witness the 'first [*erste*] ideality of nature' that is '*fulfilled* [*erfüllte*].' By 'fulfillment,' we are to understand that each of the members constituting the manifold of the body are *negated* in their independence and only have status as members insofar as their independence is annulled and related back to the subjective form permeating the whole. This permeating form, this negating activity that nullifies isolated multiplicity, *is* ideality, and it is fulfilled in that it is materialized in the world, sustains and maintains itself as such. Ideal form, then, both affirms individual members, the immediate origins of the relational process, and negates their independence in perpetuity, thereby reaffirming the immanent form, its mediated end, before undertaking the process afresh. This cycle itself is nothing but the transmogrifying current of life. It is a dynamic that Hegel also describes as an 'infinite process,' signifying a *self-referential* process of 'self-production'<sup>14</sup>—literally: 'auto (self)' and 'poiesis (creation/production)'—in which the members are the means by which the negative unity is achieved and maintained, and the negative unity is only achieved and maintained insofar as the members are sustained.

In the Hegelian lexicon, this process of life is the very meaning of subjectivity, which helps explain the significance Hegel assigns to it in his

<sup>13</sup> It is quite problematic that Petry's translation does not place adequate emphasis on '*Existenz gekommen*' as a literal 'coming into existence.' My translation emphasizes 'coming into existence' in order to accentuate the pronounced difference between the register of chemistry and that of organics. My translation, furthermore, is simultaneously more literal and more striking than Petry's cumbersome phrasing: 'the Idea has reached the initial immediacy of life.'

<sup>14</sup> Consider Cinzia Ferrini, 'The Transition to Organics: Hegel's Idea of Life,' in *A Companion to Hegel*, eds. Michael Baur and Stephen Houlgate (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 212.

final system. Strikingly, Hegel refers to this accomplishment by the living organism, its negative unity, as ‘the *idea* having come into existence.’<sup>15</sup> In the context of the dialectical development nature has so far undergone, in organic phenomena we therefore witness a qualitative advance beyond the chemical process. In the latter, an isolation between its moments still destabilizes the process, where the beginning and end, though intimately connected by internal rather than external rules, like those in mechanics, fall apart. Two compounds, while they may only interact with one another to produce a reaction (other compounds will not incite a response), produce a new compound that destroys the previous two, so that the whole process is still thoroughly bound within the confines of the inorganic (*PN*, vol. 2, 218, §335; *GW*, 20: 342). In contrast, organic life generates a field of terms with an entirely distinct constellation of possibilities that are bound to its preceding conditions, yet irreducible to them. What this achievement simultaneously indicates, however, is how this advance is won within, and alongside, the entire series of categories that have proven insufficient to give rise to such a self-relational configuration. For although autopoietic self-relationality has a self-determining structure of its own, because it still depends upon its preceding conditions (its members are, after all, *also* composed of chemical, physical, and mechanical bodies), it is only possible within, and alongside, the register of nature’s overwhelming externality, the lack of interiorized conceptuality that characterizes its previous stages of nature.

Although the living organism is, in this sense, an *achievement* of interiorized conceptuality *over* the externality of mechanics, physics, and chemistry, Hegel’s speculative analysis highlights precisely how the animal organism, as a subjective center of negative activity, is, despite its own ideality, cast *outwards*. Here, too, there is an insurmountable exteriority that sets upon it on all sides, simultaneously sustaining and threatening it, thereby accentuating the issue of Hegelian nature’s lack. The first way in which Hegel highlights this is through his account of the biological drives and instincts constituting the unconscious ground of

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<sup>15</sup> For a sense of how Hegel’s conception of the self-referential structure of natural life both connects to and breaks with Aristotle, see, for instance, Murray Greene’s ‘Natural Life and Subjectivity,’ in *Hegel’s Philosophy of Spirit*, ed. Peter G. Stillman (New York: SUNY, 1987), 94–117.

animality. At the very outset of his discussion, Hegel argues that there is a feeling of *self* implicit in the structural processes of animal corporeity, in the dynamic that makes it alive. Hegel, moreover, explicitly frames this feeling in terms of an immanent negation (*PN*, vol. 3, 141, §359; *GW*, 20: 358) that establishes the individual organism as a finite being set against the milieu of its environmental context. This precise tension between internality and externality becomes most acute in what Hegel calls the ‘practical relationship’ (*PN*, vol. 3, 141, §359; *GW*, 20: 358), which reveals the animal as dirempted within itself: on the one hand, it has the feeling of externality as its negation; on the other, the animal, as a self-relating structure, feels itself as certain of itself in the face of the material world. Hegel demarcates the organism’s duplicitous feeling of negation and self-certainly under the category of *lack* (he even speaks of ‘a feeling of lack [*Gefühl des Mangels*]’) (*PN*, vol. 3, 141, §359; *GW*, 20: 358; translation modified). Lack, in the precise sense that Hegel here employs it, holds an important position in the economy of animality: It shows the animal as a subjectivity that exists in nature *only* insofar as it is these shifting states—based on contradictory tensions between self and world, life and its environment—that reveal the ‘infinitude’ of its self-relation (*PN*, vol. 3, 141, §359 Remark; *GW*, 20: 359).

Hegel’s analysis, consequently, assigns importance to configurations that express not the stable plenum of a static structural identity, as might be abstractly stated in terms of the understanding (*Verstand*), but to those that show the organism in perpetual tensional distress and even potential trauma, ones that demarcate the perpetual transmogrification and resuscitation of the fluid dynamic under consideration. Concomitant with the animal’s subjective sense of lack, however, is the instinct to do away with lack, to negate it. Therefore, the inverted lining of lack is what Hegel denotes by way of the category of ‘instinct [*Instinct*]’ (*PN*, vol. 3, 145, §360; *GW*, 20: 361),<sup>16</sup> the instinctual tendency to overcome lack in an attempt to free itself of such negation (*PN*, vol. 3, 141, §359; *GW*, 20: 358). If the Hegelian animal, as a form of life, comes with a feeling of self

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<sup>16</sup> For a consideration of the multifarious uses of the concept of *Trieb* in nineteenth-century thought from Herder to Fichte, Hölderlin to Hegel, and others, see, for example, Myriam Bienenstock, ed., ‘Trieb: tendance, instinct, pulsion,’ Special Issue, *Revue germanique internationale*, 18 (2002).

and world, then it also confronts the world as essentially ravenous and hungry—and, more drastically, that very hunger is also what constitutes its life, its status as a materialization of the concept, for it is only insofar as it is perpetually in the process of satiating its endless cravings to move beyond its isolated interiority and out into the world that it can uphold itself as a self, as life.

As a result, lack presupposes the condition of an external material stimulation that serves as the negation of the animal—an object (or objects) against which the organism braces itself and, in so bracing, asserts itself. And this means that the negation constitutive of lack is only a moment of the assimilative process: the animal has its overcoming as ‘immanent [...] within’ (*PN*, vol. 3, 141, §359 Remark; *GW*, 20: 358) insofar as it transmogrifies the object(s) upon which it unleashes its hunger into itself, reducing them to a moment of itself. The animal does not stand for itself in isolation, therefore, as in the case of inert matter, the cold mechanism of substance where things just bump into one another, or the isolated identity of the Cartesian *cogito* psychotically withdrawn into itself and unable to be certain to regain access to the world. Rather, because of the dynamical relationship it establishes with its material other, and its instinct to act out against its own negation, it is constituted by a compulsion to devour the otherness of its environment, to make it its own, in a constant effort to overcome this lack that threatens the free, self-reflexive activity of its life. This perpetual project of defective action establishes the totality of the animal, paradoxically, only insofar as it is immanently propelled by an internal absence.

In this way, Hegel voids the move that would suggest that the animal’s internal purposiveness needs to be framed in terms of conscious deliberation or some mode of explicit intentionality (*PN*, vol. 3, 145, §360; *GW*, 20: 361).<sup>17</sup> The animal organism brings its subjective lack into action—the objective expression of lack—by way of instinct. In direct contradistinction to classic rationalism’s ‘clear and distinct ideas’

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<sup>17</sup> See the Remark to this paragraph for the relations among Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel in this context. See also Francesca Micheline, ‘Thinking Life: Hegel’s Conceptualization of Living Being as an Autopoietic Theory of Organized Systems,’ in *Purposiveness: Teleology between Nature and Mind*, eds. Luca Illetterati and Francesca Micheline (Piscataway: Transaction Books, 2008), 84 ff.; see also her ‘Hegel’s Notion of Natural Purpose,’ 134 ff.



or even consciousness' self-transparency in the early work of Sartre, this 'primordial' actualization of end-oriented activity that Hegel outlines in his *Naturphilosophie* is 'purposive activity operating in an unconscious manner' (*PN*, vol. 3, 145, §360 Remark; *GW*, 20: 361). The animal is no mere automaton as in Descartes or Schelling, but is, on the contrary, essentially subjective. It hurls itself into the world quite blindly, driven instinctually to perpetually undo, and therefore reactivate, the negative fissure it harbors within as its metaphysical condition of possibility. The net result of this speculative analysis is that the Hegelian animal is perpetually poured *outside* itself, *beyond* itself, in a series of attempts to overcome its immanent sense of lack. It is utterly immersed in the world that engulfs it; in a piecemeal fashion, it must devour the world. But this freedom is simultaneously a perpetual servitude to hunger and, by consequence, to external conditions that sustain it. In other words, it is nothing but a perpetual confrontation with, and so re-immersion in, nature's radical externality, *as the free self-reflexive activity of life*. Being thus given over to forces that it cannot control, there is an irrationality insurmountable in its life; by way of its open-ended hunger, the animal organism endures its own version of the absurd task of Sisyphus. Here, too, at the height of nature we see the problem of lack re-emerge with vigor.

### 3 The Arc of Animal Life, the Sex Relationship, and the Spurious Infinite

Having just seen how the process of assimilation continually draws and submerges the animal organism into the externality of its environment, we can now concentrate on the second mode in which this desert of the external problematizes the life and subjective structuration of the animal organism: the 'generic process.' Although we may expect the *universality* of the species to display more conceptuality than the *singular* animal, we will see that it further intensifies the problem of Hegelian nature's lack. In a crude sense of eternal return, animal offspring come to repeat the problems plaguing previous generations with the consequence that the issue of radical externality is not overcome but instead reestablished afresh again and again in a vicious cycle. This juxtaposed series of repetition is what

Hegel refers to as nature's 'spurious infinite,' which follows directly from nature's fundamental externality and lack.

In the 'generic process,' the animal organism comes to realize a broader, more comprehensive self-relationality and therefore more developed instance of subjectivity than the one encountered in the assimilative process. It is 'more comprehensive' because here the animal comes to face another who is also an individual living entity *of the same form*. On one hand, the genus manifests as an implicit unity with the individual organism whose 'concrete substance' it is (*PN*, vol. 3, 170, §367; *GW*, 20: 366). Yet, on the other, the universal genus is characterized as a disjunction, or judgment (*Urteil*), and distinguishes itself as not strictly reducible to singular individual organisms. In instantiating itself in, while also liberating itself from, singular individuality, it reveals itself as a mediating self-relation that is beyond any one instance. In this return to itself the genus accomplishes two interconnected points: first, it loses its merely subjective universal quality to the degree that it goes over to exist in and as an individual organism; second, it also negates the individual organism and thereby liberates the genus from the inadequacy of being solely identified with *this* or *that* instance. Therefore, the generic process operates as a duplicitous set of negations of both the subjective formality of the genus and the objective singularity of the individual organism, while also advancing a more robust and comprehensive sense of the animal organism's infinite self-relationality and hence its status as an advance over the instabilities plaguing the assimilative process. For whatever instabilities were discerned in the latter, they are now taken to be ultimately accidental moments of the *proper* expression of biological life, namely the life of the species.

But this newfound ideality is not itself without problems. One of the contradictions the generic process establishes is the acute tension within the individual organism where it is both the universal actualized and, conversely, a singularly individual and as such distinct from the universal genus. This tension between the universal and singular dimensions of the individual animal organism immanently manifests as a gnawing feeling of discordance, which Hegel again characterizes as 'a feeling of lack [*Gefühl dieses Mangels*]' (*PN*, vol. 3, 172, §368 [§369 in 3rd edition]; *GW*, 20: 369; translation modified). This lack resembles the feeling propelling the

animal's drive to negate the external world in the phenomenon of hunger. Here, however, lack activates an instinctual drive to overcome this discord by a finding of self and self-feeling through the mediation of another individual of the same genus. While the speculative standpoint's framing of sexual reproduction in terms of the movement of the concept and genus might seem bizarre to the contemporary perspective, it also has the strength of offering us a precise conceptual account of the ways in which the life of the animal organism is not only mired in a relationship with its environment in terms of individual sustenance (food), but also in a struggle to perpetrate the species itself (sexual relation), both of which are necessary consequences of the biological drives and instincts operative at the very core of animal life. Sexual reproduction's intensification of the animal's process of self-(re)production means a move from the particular piecemeal process of digestion towards a more comprehensive form of that autopoietic process and its universal self-relation, indicating that these phenomena are manifestations of a fundamental instinctual dimension of the animal itself. The complete overcoming of the self-(re)productivity of individuality, the introduction of the life of the genus, is the process Hegel demarcates under the category of *generation* (*PN*, vol. 3, 173, §368 [§369 in 3rd edition]; *GW*, 20: 370). However, because generation itself only occurs in virtue of the animal's feeling of incompleteness and lack—its constitutional insufficiency—as that which grounds the drive to copulation, we see, here too, there is no stable plenum of self-identity that is at the core of the animal organism.

Hegel then goes on to highlight an additional tension inherent in the generic process, but this time at the level of the genus itself instead of its singular instantiation in this or that animal. More precisely, the sexual relation is the union of the genus with itself through its bifurcation into distinct sexes. The drive to copulation, in turn, functions in terms of an auto-effacing mediation: It sublates the genus' bifurcation into sexes and actualizes the unity of the genus with itself. This may appear to suggest that the universality of the genus is completely self-mediating. However, Hegel claims that the product of the sexual relation is the '*negative identity*' (*PN*, vol. 3, 175, §369 [§370 in 3rd edition]; *GW*, 20: 370) of the differentiated individuals that entered it, that is, the offspring. Interestingly, Hegel first frames this negative identity as 'asexual,' then immediately claims that

the product of this union has the 'determination of developing' sexual differences within it and so (re-)manifesting sexuality (*PN*, vol. 3, 175, §369 [§370 in the third edition]; *GW*, 20: 370). By implication, Hegel asserts that the genus exists in and for itself only in the nauseating series of individual organisms that negate and restore sexual differences. Therefore, the offspring's sublation of the genus' internal bifurcation is always the reactualization of these tensions anew. Furthermore, insofar as the individual completes its self-(re)construction by the generation of the offspring, there is a sense in which its life thereby becomes what we might describe as a surplus of the genus' reactualization.<sup>18</sup> For in the individual's replacement of itself they become superfluous, overflow, surplus, and so expendable. In this sense, Hegel can therefore simultaneously assert that not only life, but also death is the result of sexual reproduction. Here we arrive at one of the strengths of the speculative analysis: In unfolding the complete significance of the sexual instincts, we see how they dialectically mutate and therefore implicate the necessity of the natural organism's demise.

In sexual reproduction and its concomitant death, the genus is freed from individual singularity to be (re-)instantiated in another time *x*, place *y*. But the generic process just repeats itself. Lack, the instinct to annihilate it, fornication, the genesis of new life and inevitable death, then, is what Hegel describes as the 'progress of the spurious infinite' (*PN*, vol. 3, 176, §369 [§370 in 3rd edition]; *GW*, 20: 370) constituting the precarious and exhausting trajectory of animal life. However, what needs to be recognized is that insofar as Hegel explicitly connects this reproductive process to the spurious infinite, we have an unambiguous statement of the insufficiency of such a structural process in terms of self-referential conceptuality proper and the freedom from *predominantly* external determination that such a structure demands. This spurious process, therefore, not only indicates the perpetual juxtaposition of unresolved finitude in the animal register, but also vividly instantiates the way in which the natural register more generally is permeated by the externality, exteriority, and therefore contingency that perpetually enforces this spurious finitude. In short, nature's lack is here, too, to be seen.

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<sup>18</sup> See Jay Lampert, 'Speed, Impact and Fluidity at the Barrier Between Life and Death: Hegel's Philosophy of Nature,' in *Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 10.3 (2005), 149.

## 4 Metaphysical Discord: The Vicissitudes of Animal Life and the Problems of Violence and Death

We can further intensify the problem of nature's lack by a careful analysis of the animal phenomena of violence and death. Elaborating on the nature of the genus, Hegel claims that it auto-differentiates from the most universal distinction, that of animal, into more specific determinations, those of speciation. The consequence of speciation is that organisms distinguish themselves not only from their constitutive environment (assimilation), nor via *intraspecies* relationships (sex-relation), but also in terms of *interspecies* relations—against other species. Part of the problem here is that the specific species cannot activate their genus relation by way of sexuality with other species. Therefore, in such cases of interaction, the species can only express its ideal activity by way of aggression. Hegel states: '[i]n this hostile relation to others, in which they are reduced to inorganic nature, violent death constitutes the natural fate of individuals' (*PN*, vol. 3, 177, §370 [§368 in 3rd edition]; *GW*, 20: 367). Speciation shows specific animal types closed in on all sides by the cacophony of earth's other life forms. In order to assert itself within the violence of this Hobbesesque milieu, Hegel states: '[f]or the determination of the species [...] the distinguishing characteristics have, by a happy intuition, been selected from the animal's weapons, that is, its teeth and claws etc. This is valuable, because it is by its weapons that the animal, in distinguishing itself from others, establishes and preserves itself as a being-for-itself' (*PN*, vol. 3, 178, §370 [§368 in 3rd edition] Remark; *GW*, 20: 368). By way of aggression and 'distinguishing characteristics,' then, the individual animal aims to 'reduce other species to a relative inorganicity,'<sup>19</sup> decompose them in terms of its own projects, and annihilate them. We might say that if Kant's kingdom of ends suggests the possibility of a perpetual peace, in Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* we witness the nauseating reenactment of perpetual conflict. The implication here is that otherness, in this context, perpetually maintains the precise contours of one's own death.

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<sup>19</sup> Lampert, 'Speed, Impact and Fluidity,' 150.

It is the looming contingency of its environment and the myriad of other speciations that continuously haunt the animal's existence that leads Hegel to state that these conditions: 'continually [subject ...] animal sensibility to violence and the threat of dangers, [whereby] the animal cannot escape a feeling of *insecurity*, *anxiety*, and *misery*' (PN, vol. 3, 179, §370 [§368 in 3rd edition] Remark; GW, 20: 369). This perpetual violence highlights perhaps the most important feature of animal life and Hegelian nature more generally: the looming threat of externality as the utter annihilation of subjective dynamism at each and every level. One is tempted to say that what we witness in the animal's misery is a 'pre-' or 'proto-conceptual' insight into the heart of natural things: their existential fragility, their finitude, their constant collapse into exteriority due to external pressures. The organism's constant self-deferral to externality illuminates, ultimately, what Hegel sees as the chaos of nature: an opaque source of the unimaginable closed to the possibility of complete systematization.<sup>20</sup> The natural domain perpetually forecloses the possibility of the proper self-enclosed synchronicity of elements characteristic of the conceptual register; externality continuously undermines the smooth autopoietic self-articulation of the things of nature. Hegel revealingly writes:

The *immediacy* of the idea of life consists of the concept as such failing to *exist in life*, submitting itself therefore to the manifold conditions and circumstances of external nature, and being able to appear in the most stunted of forms; the *fruitfulness* of the earth allows life to break forth *everywhere*, and in all kinds of ways. The animal world is perhaps even less able than the other sphere of nature to present an immanently independent and rational system of organization, to keep the *forms* which would be determined by the concept, and to proof them in the face of the imperfection and mixing of conditions, against mingling, stuntedness and intermediaries. This weakness of the concept in nature [*Diese Schwäche des Begriffs in der Natur*] in general, not only subjects the formation of individuals to external accidents, which in the developed animal, and particularly in man,

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, PN, vol. 1, 215, §250 Remark; GW, 20: 240; translation modified, where Hegel writes: 'This impotence on the part of nature sets limits to philosophy, and it is the height of pointlessness to demand of the concept that it should explain...or deduce these contingent products of nature...'

give rise to monstrosities, but also makes the genera themselves completely subservient to the chance of the external universal life of Nature. The life of the animal shares in the vicissitudes of this universal life [...] and consequently, it merely alternates between health and disease. (*PN*, vol. 3, 178–9, §370 [§368 in 3rd edition] Remark; *GW*, 20: 368–369; translation modified)

This passage gives us perhaps the clearest indication of what Hegel described to the poet Heinrich Heine as nature's leprosy.<sup>21</sup> The very first clause makes explicit that, for Hegel, there is a distinct sense in which the concept '*fail[s] to exist in life*' (emphasis added). This would be to say that the natural register in its entirety lacks a complete articulation of the concept as materially actualized. Moreover, it is the contingency and exteriority of the natural register that is crucial to that failure and prohibits, or at least impedes, a 'rational system of organization.' Immediacy, contingency, and exteriority not only distress individual organisms to such an extent that their lives are nothing more than an 'alternating of health and sickness' permeated by an acute sense of fear; more revealingly, the entire sphere of the genus is distressed by the teeth of animality, tearing it open. One might go so far as to suggest that this perpetual alteration of sickness and health in animal life analogically anticipates the entire process of spirit's historical unfolding in terms of the implications following from the 'slaughterhouse' of history. While there is a sense in which this perpetual conflict is the actualization of the concept in nature, there is another sense in which it is entirely insufficient for what we might call a complete actualization of the concept in the material world. Instead, this naturality, as the barest form of conceptuality, needs to be understood as inherently unstable, lacking, and, ultimately, mired in instabilities that perpetually bring it into the parameters of disintegration, thereby undermining its power as a free, self-reflexive activity.

The passage, consequently, needs to be read in two mutually reinforcing senses: first, it indicates the impotence of nature in its inability to hold fast to conceptual determinacy; second, and perhaps more importantly, it needs to be read to indicate the surplus of the natural domain,

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<sup>21</sup> See Jeffrey Reid, *Real Words: Language and System in Hegel* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 41.

the indeterminate interzonal configurations constituting the macabre and monstrous, which not only jeopardize the life of the organism, but also place limits upon the conceptual analysis itself. The latter point is to say that this monstrosity is in part the consequence of the *system's* reflections on what it discovers in the natural register. In terms of the conceptual rendering of nature—that is, a philosophy of nature—nature is monstrous in that it lacks the conceptual precision that, ontologically, is only minimally present within the domain of spirit. Speculative analysis shows that nature lacks the ability to adequately realize determinate distinctions of conceptuality because of its ruling black flag of externality. The animal organism and genus relation indicate something crucial to generating a more precise sense of the macro-implications of Hegel's final system concerning the entire register of nature. While here in the very heart of life, animality—the most pronounced expression of the idea having entered into existence—has achieved a sophisticated inwardization and self-referential structure, the ideality constituting the animal organism is continually and perpetually distressed by the complex array of external and contingent factors that compose its factual environment. It is constitutively given over to an Other that constantly threatens it with definitive annihilation. In this second sense we can say that it is the fragmentary life of nature in its monstrous contingency that shows us *the 'weakness of the concept' [Schwäche des Begriffs in der Natur]* (emphasis added). What these two points attest to is that, even insofar as the animal organism anticipates, in distinct ways, the emergent freedom of spirit, the natural realm of radical exteriority still poses a problem for the animal organism. In a way not unlike Freudian repression, as the animal organism attempts to restructure the natural register the latter returns with a significance that it never had before. We may even say that the problem of exteriority intensifies because the consequences of what is at stake increase in due proportion. In this sense, the lack of nature becomes all the more important as a problem because it now shows itself as having the ability to undermine, even annihilate, the inchoate project of freedom, the first traces of which are sketched here.

But Hegel sings one last dialectical song of death. Death arises in the animal organism not just as a surplus of sexual reproduction or due to the violence of interspecies conflict. More precisely, both are a result of a more



fundamental metaphysical tension. Despite being the ‘living concept,’ the animal organism finds itself bound *within* the sphere of nature, within the radical contingency and indeterminacy of externality. Hegel writes: ‘[t]he individual is subject to this universal inadequacy [...] because as an animal it stands *within* nature’ (*PN*, vol. 3, 208, §374; *GW*, 20: 374). As such, it is continually haunted by the facticity of its naturalness, the overwhelming externality that throws it beyond the universal self-referential structure that is its negative, ideal, center. Animal life, therefore, cannot help but activate the discrepancy between the organism’s inner implicit universality and the irreducibly singular moments of its biological life. This metaphysical discordance constitutes the animal organism’s very being and is, consequently, inescapable. Indeed, this problem permeates animal life to such a point that Hegel strikingly calls it the ‘*germ of death* [Keim des Todes],’ the organism’s ‘*original sickness* [ursprüngliche Krankheit]’ (*PN*, vol. 3, 209, §375; *GW*, 20: 375; translation modified). In this sense, nature’s lack grounds the inalienable structural destiny of every natural creature: in living, in being given over to externality at every step, a natural creature manifests the oblivion of its own negation (death).<sup>22</sup> It is the disparity, the instability, the indeterminate non-correspondence between the singular existence of the individual organism and the universality of the concept—which marks the former as finite and constitutes *the* natural contradiction—that the concluding paragraphs of Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie* address. In living this contradiction, the organism is ultimately forced into giving up its singular existence. In repeating the process constituting its corporeity, the animal slowly loses vitality, as if the matter of its body cannot keep the spark of proto-spirit life within it burning. It becomes, in this precise sense, a victim of what Hegel revealingly calls *habit* (*PN*, vol. 3, 173, §375; *GW*, 20: 375; translation modified).

The ossified processes of life thus bring the organism into the house of the dead. However, there is no further nature can go: natural death marks the last ‘*self-externality* of nature [that] is sublated so that the concept, which in nature merely has implicit being, has become *for itself*’ (*PN*, vol. 3, 211, §376; *GW*, 20: 375; translation modified). Whatever one is

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<sup>22</sup> We take this to be why Lampert writes: ‘Natural life is by definition killing itself’ (‘Speed, Impact and Fluidity,’ 153).

to make of Hegel's cryptic utterance concerning the concept's 'becoming for itself' by way of natural death, one thing is clear: the register of spirit, the realm of the concept, *begins* within the problem of nature and consequently with the traumatic lack that characterizes that domain, for it can only prove to be a realm of genuine free auto-actualization by accomplishing what animality could not, which means it must take itself up *within*, and therefore also *against*, the natural register. It is only in spirit proper, for Hegel, that the concept has an actuality that corresponds to it; it is spirit that wins the ability to surpass the spurious cycle of individuality constituting the reproductive series of animal life. The proper existence of the concept, therefore, is only articulated by emphasizing the triumphs of spirit over the tendency to externality and calcification characteristic of the register of nature strictly speaking. Nevertheless, it is the very weakness of nature that proves utterly crucial here: it provides the material for that very restructuring activity that radically outstrips the inabilities of externality. In this precise sense, in the Hegelian system nature is a necessary yet insufficient condition for the life of the concept proper. This development of the life of the concept, therefore, marks the realm of spirit as an outgrowth of nature. Simultaneously, it establishes it as a beyond of the natural domain, restructuring the latter in terms of coordinates that spirit itself has produced and aligned. This autogenesis, consequently, marks the distinctness of spirit while also noting its indebtedness to its natural origins. This retroactivity—spirit in an important sense *makes what it is* only by making itself *out of a nature that is pre-given*, whereby it is belated to itself—marks a lasting fissure between the realm of nature and that of the domain of spirit that in no uncertain terms marks the chasm separating yet connecting the two.

## 5 The Ambivalent Significance of Nature's Lack

Hegel's speculative *Naturphilosophie* insists on 'the impotence of nature [*der Ohnmacht der Natur*]' (PN, vol. 1, 215, §250 Remark; GW, 20: 240): its constitutive lack, its inability to hold, ontologically, onto interiorized subjectivation and, in terms of speculative analysis, to firm

conceptual determinations that would exhaustively totalize its domain. By concentrating on Hegel's account of the animal organism, I have tried to illuminate the general determination of nature as externality, as lacking more robust forms of interiority or subjectivity. Hegelian nature, a thoroughgoing externality, comes, through its own movement, to generate sophisticated configurations of internality in mechanics, physics, and chemistry. Yet in the animal organism, the 'highest to which nature drives in its determinate being' (*PN*, vol. 1, 209, §248 Remark; *GW*, 20: 238), these configurations remain acutely exposed to various modalities of strife and, ultimately, death, vividly expressing the externality that permeates nature all the way across. Due to its constitutive lack, nature can therefore be viewed as inherently unstable to the exact extent that it is unable to establish itself as a unified totality.<sup>23</sup> This proclaims, contra Modernism's Substance, Hegelian nature is radically *not a hen kai pan*—its incompleteness in terms of conceptuality means that it is impossible to accurately speak of it as a totality. Nor is it, contrary to standard interpretations in Hegel literature, thoroughly rational, stable, and operating in terms of the strict transitions of dialectical necessity.

What we arrive at here is one of the most under-recognized and under-appreciated aspects of Hegel's mature thought: that there is a sophisticated and robust materialism in his final system that forms the very basis for the emergence of the ideational activity of thought, the institutional matrices of spirit proper, and its retroactivity as instantiated in the formation of its own second nature. The point is that, without taking seriously the key upshots of Hegel's philosophy of nature, this unruly materialist dimension is obscured, or worse, entirely elided. By the above overview of what a Hegelian philosophy of nature might look like when we take it seriously, my hope is to have intimated, at the very least, the great range of implications that thereby arise for his system as a whole. My wager is that in doing so I have painted a portrait of what we might

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<sup>23</sup> In regards to the incompleteness of nature Hegel appears to suggest, in an oral remark, that it finds unity through the activity of thought thinking nature. In this sense, spirit gives a unity to nature that it did not have in itself. If this is the case, it is only through spirit that a sense of totality might appear for itself. For this ambivalent aspect of Hegel's nature-philosophy, see *PN*, vol. 1, 198, §246 Addition; *Werke in zwanzig Bänden. Auf der Grundlage der Werke von 1832–45 neu edierte Ausgabe*, vol. 9, eds E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 16.

call ‘the *other* Hegel.’ This new Hegel, although paradoxically more historically accurate, acknowledges the intermediary and even monstrous aspects of the natural register. He not only assigns to it an autonomy and independence that is under-emphasized in several contemporary readings of his work, but also insists that it has the perpetual possibility to frustrate, and subvert, the conceptual dictates of the understanding and reason in their task of rendering it intelligible.

Furthermore, this other Hegel’s analysis of the animal organism shows us, in no uncertain terms, that spirit’s material basis, the unruly exteriority of the natural register, necessarily poses problems for the autopoietic activity characteristic of spirit. We can say this because in Hegel’s system *such problems are continuously carried forward*. Consequently, the problems that the speculative analysis shows to beset the animal organism in the concluding sections of the *Naturphilosophie*—sex, violence, death—carry over into the register of spirit. Indeed, the issue of nature’s lack of conceptual structuration, its exteriority, is *the* problem speculative analysis must confront in its transition from the domain of nature to that of spirit. The very fact that this presents a problem for spirit’s free actualizing activity is why so much of Hegel’s speculative anthropology is littered with references to its immersion in nature, its naturalness as the unconscious ‘sleep’ of spirit,<sup>24</sup> the pathology of dependence implicated in the *in utero* relation,<sup>25</sup> and the unconscious fixations driving psychopathology.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, the transition from one register to the other does not come about without strife or traumatic consequences. In reading the concluding sections of the philosophy of nature, while anticipating the opening sections of the philosophy of spirit, we witness a repeated non-synchronicity between not only the interiority and exteriority of the various biological structures under consideration, but also between the generative activity of spirit and the recalcitrant exteriority of material nature more generally. The breakdown between these two spheres constitutes a lasting tension within Hegel’s thought and, ultimately, is designed

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<sup>24</sup> Here consider *Hegel’s Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. M.J. Petry (Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing, 1978), 115, §387.

<sup>25</sup> *Hegel’s Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, vol. 2, 235 ff., §405.

<sup>26</sup> *Hegel’s Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, vol. 2, 327 ff., §408.

to tell us something fundamental not only at the speculative level, but at the ontological as well, that is, about material nature and spirit's power of negation.

Critically and systematically thinking this aspect of Hegel's thought shows the untimely purchase of his position as it relates to the philosophical need of our contemporary world. It allows us to think that there is a fundamental materiality to the natural register that has its own life, its own rhythm, and that operates independently of the institutional matrices of the domain of spirit. It would be no exaggeration to claim that Hegel affirms what Adorno would call the non-identity of thought and objects, the surplus of the latter over the former. Indeed, this fundamental materiality even demonstrates that Hegel's *Naturphilosophie*, which is also interested in the 'proto-life' of mechanical, physical, and chemical bodies, offers a sophisticated version of what one would today call an 'object-oriented ontology' and thus compliments several strands of contemporary metaphysical inquiry. Simultaneously, it allows us to think the ways in which the emergence of spirit's autogenetic activity is fundamentally dependent on nature's material conditions (as instantiated, for instance, in the animal organism's biological functions), yet nonetheless utterly irreducible to those precedent conditions in such a way that opens up the possibility of a robust, non-dogmatic idealism that outstrips those precedent conditions. In this sense, Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* offers us both sides of the materialist-idealist coin without collapsing into either. It offers a non-reductive materialism, as articulated in various registers of objects it describes, while also making room for the self-reflexive activity of thought (ideality) to be, nevertheless, bound to the pulsations of the material conditions that make its very emergence possible, *even though it is free from them in creating the independent world of spirit*. Pursuing Hegel in line with these concerns makes his final system strikingly relevant for our contemporary world.

# 10

## Absolutely Contingent: Slavoj Žižek and the Hegelian Contingency of Necessity

Adrian Johnston

Over the lengthy arc of his still-unfurling intellectual itinerary, Slavoj Žižek has consistently combatted various received textbook caricatures of the German idealist giant G.W.F. Hegel.<sup>1</sup> This struggle, one with deep roots in certain venerable strains of the Marxist tradition,<sup>2</sup> to recover and redeploy a ‘real Hegel’ (a dialectical materialist one *avant la lettre*)

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *ŽO*] (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 123–268.

<sup>2</sup> See Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, trans. C.P. Dutt (New York: International, 1941), 11–13, 24; Georgi Plekhanov, ‘For the Sixtieth Anniversary of Hegel’s Death,’ in *Selected Philosophical Works in Five Volumes*, vol. 1, trans. R. Dixon (Moscow: Foreign Languages, 1974), 468, 472, 477; V.I. Lenin, ‘Conspectus of Hegel’s Book *The Science of Logic*,’ in *Philosophical Notebooks*, trans. Clemence Dutt, vol. 38 of *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 189–191; Nikolai Bukharin, *Philosophical Arabesques*, trans. Renfrey Clarke (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2005), 57, 114–116, 325; and Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976), xxvi, 275–276, 324–325, 345–348, 350, 352, 398–399, 474–476, 510–511.

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who appears strikingly unfamiliar and heterodox by the standards of established (mis)understandings of Hegelianism indeed is the central red thread in Žižek's latest major philosophical works, his 2012 *magnum opus*, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, and its 2014 sequel, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*. He currently remains predominantly occupied with a 'return to Hegel' profoundly akin to, and, in fact, partly modeled on, Jacques Lacan's 'return to Freud.'<sup>3</sup>

Diametrically opposed to the widespread misreading of Hegel as the philosopher of absolute necessity *par excellence*, Žižek prioritizes contingency as the Alpha and Omega of true, undistorted Hegelianism (ŽO, 126–128, 141, 221). In *Less Than Nothing*, he repeatedly and forcefully reaffirms the primacy of this modality in Hegel's thinking, adamantly underscoring the contention that necessity itself is contingent for Hegel.<sup>4</sup> Although pointedly at odds with the superficial impressions of Hegelian speculative dialectics prevailing among non-specialists of various types within and beyond the world of professional academic philosophy, this Žižekian premium placed on contingency is echoed by certain other scholars with expertise regarding German idealism generally and Hegel especially. Such diverse interpreters of Hegel's texts as (in a non-exhaustive alphabetical list) Louis Althusser,<sup>5</sup> Ermanno Bencivenga,<sup>6</sup> John Burbidge,<sup>7</sup> André Doz,<sup>8</sup> Dieter Henrich,<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *AR*] (London: Verso, 2014), 35–36.

<sup>4</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *LTN*] (London: Verso, 2012), 98, 467–469, 637–638.

<sup>5</sup> Louis Althusser, 'Man, That Night,' in *The Spectre of Hegel: Early Writings*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 1997), 170.

<sup>6</sup> Ermanno Bencivenga, *Hegel's Dialectical Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 72.

<sup>7</sup> John W. Burbidge, *Hegel's Systematic Contingency* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 16–17, 41–43, 47.

<sup>8</sup> André Doz, *La logique de Hegel et les problèmes traditionnels de l'ontologie* (Paris: Vrin, 1987), 151.

<sup>9</sup> Dieter Henrich, 'Hegels Theorie über den Zufall,' in *Hegel im Kontext. Mit einem Nachwort zur Neuauflage* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2010), 160, 165.

Jean Hyppolite,<sup>10</sup> Jean-Marie Lardic,<sup>11</sup> Gérard Lebrun,<sup>12</sup> Georg Lukács,<sup>13</sup> Bernard Mabile,<sup>14</sup> Catherine Malabou,<sup>15</sup> Herbert Marcuse,<sup>16</sup> Gilles Marmasse,<sup>17</sup> Terry Pinkard,<sup>18</sup> Emmanuel Renault,<sup>19</sup> and Stanley Rosen<sup>20</sup> converge on a consensus (one in which Žižek too participates) having it that the Hegelian Absolute intrinsically entails an irreparable lack of greater meta-level grounding grounds, an ineliminable, factual ‘without why (*ohne Warum*)’—in short, an ultimate, unsurpassable contingency. Within the admittedly broad spectrum of readings of Hegel-on-contingency represented by this just-listed group of authors, Žižek is to be situated on one far end of it within which the contingent is said to be not only acknowledged in Hegel’s corpus, but is also argued to enjoy an unrivaled ultimacy in this *oeuvre*.

Having dealt elsewhere with both pre-2012 Žižek on Hegelian contingency (in the third part of my 2008 book *Žižek’s Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity*) and the contingent in Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie* specifically,<sup>21</sup> I herein will scrutinize Žižek’s more recent glosses in *Less Than Nothing* and *Absolute Recoil* on the contingent

<sup>10</sup> Jean Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, trans. Leonard Lawlor and Amit Sen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 174–175.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Marie Lardic, ‘Présentation,’ in G.W.F. Hegel and Jean-Marie Lardic, *Comment le sens commun comprend la philosophie, suivi de La contingence chez Hegel* (Paris: Actes Sud, 1989), 28; Lardic, ‘Hegel et la contingence,’ *Comment le sens commun*, 63.

<sup>12</sup> Gérard Lebrun, *L’envers de la dialectique: Hegel à la lumière de Nietzsche* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004), 25–72.

<sup>13</sup> Lukács, *The Young Hegel*, 394.

<sup>14</sup> Bernard Mabile, *Hegel: L’épreuve de la contingence* (Paris: Aubier, 1999), 95–96.

<sup>15</sup> Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans. Lisabeth During (New York: Routledge, 2005), 73–74, 160–164, 183.

<sup>16</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, trans. Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 97, 102.

<sup>17</sup> Gilles Marmasse, *Penser le réel: Hegel, la nature et l’esprit* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2008), 139, 142, 146–147, 347, 410–411, 416–418.

<sup>18</sup> Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Naturalism: Mind, Nature, and the Final Ends of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 119–120.

<sup>19</sup> Emmanuel Renault, *Hegel: La naturalisation de la dialectique* (Paris: Vrin, 2001), 60.

<sup>20</sup> Stanley Rosen, *The Idea of Hegel’s Science of Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 302.

<sup>21</sup> Adrian Johnston, ‘The Voiding of Weak Nature: The Transcendental Materialist Kernels of Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie*,’ *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 33.1 (Spring 2012): 103–157.



as per Hegelianism. Although the contingent features in myriad guises throughout both *Phänomenologie* and *Realphilosophie* as branches of the Hegelian System distinct from *Logik* per se, the final third ('Actuality [*Wirklichkeit*']') of the second book ('The Doctrine of Essence') of both the *Science of Logic* and three successive editions (1817, 1827, and 1830) of the *Encyclopedia Logic* (as well as the 1831 Berlin *Lectures on Logic*) contain in logically/categorially distilled purity Hegel's decisive treatments of the modalities of actuality, possibility (*Möglichkeit*), necessity (*Notwendigkeit*), and contingency (*Zufälligkeit*).<sup>22</sup> In a companion piece to this intervention, I interpret how Hegel conceptualizes these modalities within the apparatus of the 1812-and-after versions of his *Logic*.<sup>23</sup> Portions of my discussion below of Žižek's characterizations of Hegelian contingency presuppose the exegetical tasks performed in this companion piece by me.

Before anything else, the intimate link in Žižek's current thinking between Hegelian contingency and post-Hegelian dialectical materialism should be appropriately scrutinized in some detail. Of course, the phrase 'dialectical materialism' appears in the subtitles of both *Less Than Nothing* and *Absolute Recoil*. Revealingly, the former tome goes so far as to contend that:

The true foundation of dialectical materialism is not the necessity of contingency, but the contingency of necessity. In other words, while the second position opts for a secret invisible necessity beneath the surface of contingency [...] the first position asserts contingency as the abyssal ground of necessity itself. (*LTN*, 791)

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<sup>22</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *SL*], trans. A.V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), 529–571; *GW*, 11: 380–392. Citations of Hegel refer to the pagination of the English translation, followed by the numbered paragraph or paragraphs of the original in brackets, in turn followed by the pagination of the *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968–), except when a text is not a part of the latter. References to the critical edition are given by the abbreviation *GW*, volume and page number.

<sup>23</sup> Adrian Johnston, 'Contingency, pure contingency—without any further determination: Modal Categories in Hegelian Logic [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *CPC*],' in 'The New Life of German Idealism,' ed. Kirill Chepurin, Special Issue, *Logos: A Journal of Philosophy and Literature [in Russian]* (forthcoming).

First and foremost given my purposes in the present context, it should be noted that Žižek himself openly asserts a direct connection between the contingent *à la* Hegel and the dialectical materialism his ongoing, well-underway philosophical labors aim to revivify for the twenty-first century. The baseless base of an absolute, ultimate *Ur*-contingency (that is, ‘the contingency of necessity’ *qua* ‘the abyssal ground of necessity itself’) is said by him to be ‘the true foundation of dialectical materialism’ (*AR*, 26). Of a piece with this, *Less Than Nothing* also calls for playing off Hegel against Karl Marx by bringing to light a dialectical materialist version of the former (207, 449–450, 452–453, 525, 857–858). In Žižek’s eyes, reinventing dialectical materialism for today requires extracting it out of nothing other than Hegelian philosophy properly construed (*AR*, 12), a philosophy at least as concealed and misrecognized as revealed and recognized by the Marxist tradition within which ‘dialectical materialism’ explicitly arises by name approximately 4 years after Marx’s death<sup>24</sup> (in 1887, Joseph Dietzgen<sup>25</sup> and Karl Kautsky<sup>26</sup> each coin the very phrase under the inspiration of Friedrich Engels, especially the Engels of the trilogy formed by *Anti-Dühring*, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, and *Dialectics of Nature*, as much as Marx himself).

As if to emphasize this asserted superiority of Hegelian dialectical materialism *avant la lettre* to Marxian dialectical materialism *après la lettre*, Žižek, at another moment in *Less Than Nothing*, criticizes the later Althusser for allegedly excluding Hegel from the eclectic, motley ranks of the ‘underground current’ in the philosophical history of ‘the materialism of the encounter’ (that is, an ‘aleatory materialism’ in which contingencies *qua* unpredictable chance events disrupt and displace the necessities

<sup>24</sup> Adrian Johnston, ‘From Scientific Socialism to Socialist Science: *Naturdialektik* Then and Now,’ in *The Idea of Communism 2: The New York Conference*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2013), 103–136; ‘Materialism Without Materialism: Slavoj Žižek and the Disappearance of Matter,’ in *Slavoj Žižek and Dialectical Materialism*, ed. Agon Hamza and Frank Ruda (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan [forthcoming 2015]); ‘This is orthodox Marxism: The Shared Materialist *Weltanschauung* of Marx and Engels,’ in ‘On Sebastiano Timpanaro,’ Special Issue, *Quaderni materialisti* (forthcoming); *A Weak Nature Alone*, vol. 2 of *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press [forthcoming]).

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Dietzgen, *Excursions of a Socialist Into the Domain of Epistemology*, trans. Max Beer and Theodor Rothstein [1887], <http://marxists.org/archive/dietzgen/1887/epistemology.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Kautsky, *Frederick Engels: His Life, His Work, and His Writings*, trans. May Wood Simmons [1887/1888], <http://marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1887/xx/engels.htm>.

posited as causal laws by the mechanical materialisms and teleological processes of certain permutations of Marxian historical and dialectical materialism). Žižek remarks:

...the point of Hegelian dialectical analysis is not to reduce the chaotic flow of events to a deeper necessity, but to unearth the contingency of the rise of necessity itself—this is what it means to grasp things ‘in their becoming.’ So when, in his late text ‘The Subterranean Current of the Materialism of the Encounter,’ Althusser endeavors to discern, beneath the hegemonic idealist orientation of Origins/Sense, etc., the subterranean tradition of ‘aleatory materialism’—Epicurus (and the Stoics?) versus Plato, Machiavelli versus Descartes, Spinoza versus Kant and Hegel, Marx, Heidegger—the least one can say is that he is wrong to locate Hegel in the hegemonic ‘idealist’ line. (*LTN*, 575–576)

Admittedly, this particular Althusser does not highlight Hegel’s name as prominently included in the pantheon of the ‘mighty dead’ of the hidden history (that is, the ‘underground current’) of the aleatory materialism of the encounter (with the word ‘encounter’ signifying the primacy of contingency over necessity).<sup>27</sup> And Althusser indeed suggests that (a certain) Hegel(ianism) is partly responsible for the non-aleatory materialisms within the Marxist tradition he seeks to combat in the final phases of his theorizing (such as Stalinism’s notorious *diamat* of deservedly ill repute).<sup>28</sup>

Nonetheless, at various junctures throughout Althusser’s theoretical career (including ones roughly contemporaneous both chronologically and conceptually with ‘The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter’ from the early 1980s), he approvingly credits Hegel with replacing any and every necessary, meaningful ‘in the Beginning’ (with the capital B signaling a non-factual Origin) with a contingent,

<sup>27</sup> Louis Althusser, ‘The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter,’ in *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978–1987*, ed. François Matheron and Oliver Corpet, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2006), 188–190, 194–196; ‘Philosophy and Marxism: Interviews with Fernanda Navarro, 1984–87,’ in *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 261–262, 273.

<sup>28</sup> Althusser, ‘Philosophy and Marxism,’ in *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 257, 275; Adrian Johnston, ‘Marx’s Bones: Breaking with Althusser,’ in *Reading Capital, 1965–2015*, ed. Nick Nesbitt (Durham: Duke University Press [forthcoming]) and *A Weak Nature Alone*.

meaningless *in medias res* (as factual givenness/throwness).<sup>29</sup> Moreover, 'The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter' and closely related texts explicitly identify this very replacement that Althusser elsewhere acknowledges Hegel executes as one of the hallmark defining characteristics of aleatory materialism.<sup>30</sup> In fact, on multiple occasions, he frankly underscores a number of Hegel's virtues, including: one, his insistence on the depth and breadth of historical mediation;<sup>31</sup> two, the stress on modern bourgeois capitalism's creation of a steadily swelling rabble (*Pöbel*) through relentlessly increasing disparity between market-generated wealth and poverty<sup>32</sup> (a topic so intensely dear to the recent Žižek, along with the Frank Ruda of *Hegel's Rabble* [2011], that he even invokes Hegel's *Pöbel*, invoked also by Georgi Plekhanov,<sup>33</sup> as key evidence of the greater contemporary relevance of Hegel by comparison with Marx—the argument being that the oppressed masses of today's capitalism are better represented as a Hegelian rabble economically excluded than a Marxian proletariat economically exploited

<sup>29</sup> Louis Althusser, 'The Humanist Controversy,' in *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings (1966–1967)*, ed. François Matheron, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2003), 240–241; 'Elements of Self-Criticism,' in *Essays in Self-Criticism*, trans. Grahame Locke (London: New Left Books, 1976), 135; *Être marxiste en philosophie*, ed. G.M. Goshgarian (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2015), 71–76.

<sup>30</sup> Althusser, 'The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter,' in *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 169–171, 188–190; 'Correspondence about 'Philosophy and Marxism': Letter to Fernanda Navarro, 10 July 1984,' in *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 217–218; 'Philosophy and Marxism,' 272–273, 277–278; 'Portrait of the Materialist Philosopher,' in *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 290–291.

<sup>31</sup> Louis Althusser, 'On Feuerbach,' in *The Humanist Controversy*, 88–89; 'The Humanist Controversy,' in *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, 234, 241–242; 'Reply to John Lewis,' in *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 54, 56; 'Réponse à une critique,' in *Écrits philosophiques et politiques*, vol. 2, ed. François Matheron (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1994–5), 378.

<sup>32</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, 'Fragments of Historical Studies,' in *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, ed. Jon Stewart, trans. C. Hamlin and H.S. Harris (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 99; *System of Ethical Life (1802/3) and First Philosophy of Spirit (Part III of the System of Speculative Philosophy 1803/4)*, ed. and trans. H.S. Harris and T.M. Knox (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), 170–171; *GW*, 5: 353–354; G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *EPR*], ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 266–268, §244–246, 269, §248; *GW*, 14.1: 194–195, 196; 'On the English Reform Bill,' in *Political Writings*, ed. Laurence Dickey and H.B. Nisbet, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 255–256; *GW*, 16: 367–372; Althusser, 'Philosophy and Marxism,' 276.

<sup>33</sup> Plekhanov, 'For the Sixtieth Anniversary of Hegel's Death,' 471–472.

[*LTN*, 437–438; *AR*, 23, 44)]; three, the denial of predictive power to the philosopher/theorist<sup>34</sup> (for the Hegel of the preface to 1821's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* [*EPR*, 21–23; *GW*, 14,1: 15–16], the Walter Benjamin of 1940's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,'<sup>35</sup> the later Althusser, and Žižek (*LTN*, 217–223) alike, traditional, 'orthodox' Marxism can and should give up its dubious claims to the effect that historical/dialectical materialism enjoys science-like predictive power as regards socio-historical futures—with *Less Than Nothing* praising the modesty of Hegel's 'absolute idealism' for its acceptance that its Absolute is the result of the Owl of Minerva's backwards glance from the present over the past, a position always liable to being unforeseeably de-absolutized thanks to undoing by the impossible-to-anticipate *à venir* [*LTN*, 388–392]).

What is more, Althusser's short, fragment-like late piece 'Portrait of the Materialist Philosopher' contains a list of historical and (then) contemporary heralds of aleatory materialism that includes Hegel by name. Referring to the philosopher of the encounter, Althusser writes:

...he reads the Hindus. and Chinese (Zen), as well as Machiavelli, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Cavaillès, Canguilhem, Vuillemin, Heidegger, Derrida, Deleuze, and so on. Thus, without having intended to, he becomes a quasi-professional materialist philosopher—not that horror, a *dialectical* materialist, but an aleatory materialist.<sup>36</sup>

The 'dialectical materialist horror' decried here is nothing other than the official philosophical dogma of Soviet 'Really Existing Socialism,' namely, J.V. Stalin's *diamat*.<sup>37</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, Althusser, despite his

<sup>34</sup> Althusser, 'Philosophy and Marxism,' 279.

<sup>35</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 253–264.

<sup>36</sup> Althusser, 'Portrait of the Materialist Philosopher,' 291.

<sup>37</sup> Louis Althusser, 'The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy,' in *The Humanist Controversy*, 188–189; 'Une question posée par Louis Althusser,' in *Écrits philosophiques et politiques*, vol. 1, 346–347, 353–356; 'The Transformation of Philosophy,' trans. Thomas E. Lewis, in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and Other Essays*, ed. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 1990), 262–264; 'Marxism Today,' trans. James H. Kavanagh, in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy*, 276–277; *Initiation à la philosophie pour les non-philosophes*, ed. G.M. Goshgarian (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2014), 379–381; 22<sup>e</sup> congress (Paris: François Maspero,

rejection of the Stalinist version of dialectical materialism, defensibly can be construed as far from wholly and consistently opposed to possible non-Stalinist re-appropriations of this label.<sup>38</sup> Combined with the positive side of Althusserian ambivalence *vis-à-vis* Hegel—the later Althusser even evinces hesitation and uncertainty about the correctness of his grasp of Hegelian philosophy when he confesses in a letter to Fernanda Navarro that, ‘Hegel [...] remains, after all, the fundamental reference for everyone, since he is himself such a “continent” that it takes practically a whole lifetime to come to know him well’<sup>39</sup>—certain sides of Althusser, at least, would not be opposed (despite what Žižek seems to believe) to Žižek’s heterodox reinvention of ‘dialectical materialism’ via Hegel. Additionally, in ‘The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter,’ aleatory materialism is directly associated with the Hegelian dialectical dynamic of the becoming-necessary of the originally contingent:

...no determination. of the being which issues from the ‘taking-hold’ of the encounter is prefigured, even in outline, in the being of the elements that converge in the encounter. Quite the contrary: no determination of these elements can be assigned except by *working backwards* from the result to its becoming, in its retroaction. If we must therefore say that there can be no result without its becoming (Hegel), we must also affirm that there is nothing which has become except as determined by the result of this becoming—this retroaction itself (Canguilhem). That is, instead of thinking contingency as a modality of necessity, or an exception to it, we must think necessity as the becoming-necessary of the encounter of contingencies.<sup>40</sup>

Like Althusser here (‘there can be no result without its becoming’), Žižek repeatedly draws attention to the significant fact that such paradigmatically Hegelian terms as the Absolute, the Concept, the Idea, and the

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1977), 30–31; *Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste* (Paris: François Maspero, 1978), 91, 96; ‘Correspondence about ‘Philosophy and Marxism’: Letter to Fernanda Navarro, 10 July 1984,’ 217 ‘Correspondence about ‘Philosophy and Marxism’: Letter to Fernanda Navarro, 8 April 1986,’ 242; ‘Philosophy and Marxism,’ 253–255.

<sup>38</sup> Johnston, ‘Marx’s Bones,’ *A Weak Nature Alone*.

<sup>39</sup> Althusser, ‘Correspondence about ‘Philosophy and Marxism’: Letter to Fernanda Navarro, 18 September 1984,’ 229.

<sup>40</sup> Althusser, ‘The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter,’ 193–194.

like designate, for Hegel, results, namely, outcomes rather than origins, bottom-up/immanent One-effects rather than top-down/transcendent One-causes (*LTN*, 11–13, 15–16, 291, 473, 528, 611, 665, 811; *AR*, 243–244, 377).

The Althusser of the above block quotation sees the addition of a Canguilhemian supplement to Hegel as requisite to arrive at the conception of ‘necessity as the becoming-necessary of the encounter of contingencies.’ By contrast, the credit this Althusser withholds from Hegel and extends to Georges Canguilhem is generously granted to Hegel by Žižek (with Žižek’s psychoanalytically inflected exegesis of Hegel’s philosophy insisting on the crucial role of retroaction [along the lines of Sigmund Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit* and Lacan’s *après-coup*] within this philosophy [*LTN*, 618, 629, 779; *AR*, 187–188, 191–192])—this thread too is integrally woven into the Žižekian narrative about Hegelian contingency [see *ŽO*, 126–127, 173]). Nonetheless, both the late Althusser (through a combination of Hegel and Canguilhem) and Žižek (through Hegel alone) arrive at an aleatory and/or dialectical materialism resting upon the thesis according to which (and appropriately worded in Hegelian fashion) the distinction between the categories of contingency and necessity is a distinction internal to the category of contingency itself. That is to say, for Althusserian aleatory materialism (as partly Hegelian) and Žižekian dialectical materialism (as fully Hegelian) alike, the contingent is the ultimate, abyssal *Ur*-modality.

I now want to examine Žižek’s handling of the immensely important topic of teleology in relation to Hegel. Žižek addresses things (allegedly) teleological in Hegelianism mainly at the real-philosophical (that is, more-than-logical) level of history. *Less Than Nothing*, in the context of contrasting Hegel’s philosophy as self-avowedly blind to the future (*à la* the Owl of Minerva) with Marx’s historical materialism as a ‘science of history’ purportedly possessing predictive powers (*LTN*, 200, 222–223), observes that ‘historical Necessity does not pre-exist the contingent process of its actualization, that is [...] the historical process is also in itself “open,” undecided’ (*LTN*, 217). Žižek continues:

This is how one should read Hegel’s thesis that, in the course of the dialectical development, things ‘become what they are’: it is not that a temporal

deployment merely actualizes some pre-existing atemporal conceptual structure—this atemporal conceptual structure is itself the result of contingent temporal decisions. (*LTN*, 218)

These remarks, consistent with Hegel himself (CPC), amount to insisting that historical structures and dynamics as per *Geschichtsphilosophie* as a branch of *Realphilosophie* indeed instantiate the structures and dynamics of the modal categories as per *Logik*. In line with Hegel's depiction of the necessary as a subsequent result *qua* outcome or product immanently generated out of the contingent (CPC), Žižek stresses, 'if, due to contingency, a story emerges at the end, *then* this story will appear as necessary. Yes, the story is necessary, but its necessity is itself contingent' (*LTN*, 225). This echoes Hegel's 'it is, because it is' of 'absolute necessity' in the *Science of Logic* (*SL*, 552; *GW*, 11: 391; see also CPC). This also suggests that there is an unavoidable and inescapable 'necessary illusion' (to risk using a Kantian phrase) for the backwards glance of the philosopher of history making it such that the sequence of historical actualities leading from the past up through the present always must appear to this glance as necessary—and this insofar as, had history been otherwise, then the *hic et nunc* would not be what it is (that is, for any given historical present to be the present that it is, its historical past is necessary *qua* 'cannot be otherwise' [*ŽO*, 126–127]). A couple of pages later, Žižek adds, 'the Hegelian dialectical process is not this "saturated," self-contained, necessary Whole, but the *open and contingent process through which such a Whole forms itself*.' (*LTN*, 227) Again, this 'Whole,' whether as the Absolute, necessity, or whatever else along these Hegelian lines, is an Omega rather than an Alpha, an effect rather than a cause (CPC).

At the same moment in *Less Than Nothing*, Žižek inserts the stipulation that the kinetic interactions between contingency and necessity in Hegelian history also involve retroactions of the present and future upon the past (*LTN*, 218–219). He then connects this historical *Nachträglichkeit/après-coup* with a critique of the pretensions of certain Marxist materialists to enjoy powers of foresight into the *à venir*:

...does. Hegel's thought harbor such an openness towards the future, or does the closure of his System a priori preclude it? In spite of misleading



appearances, we should answer yes, Hegel's thought is open towards the future, but precisely on account of its closure. That is to say, Hegel's opening towards the future is a *negative*: it is articulated in his negative/limiting statements like the famous 'one cannot jump ahead of one's time' from his *Philosophy of Right*. The impossibility of directly borrowing from the future is grounded in the very fact of retroactivity which makes the future a priori unpredictable: we cannot climb onto our own shoulders and see ourselves 'objectively,' in terms of the way we fit into the texture of history, because this texture is again and again retroactively rearranged. (*LTN*, 221)

With this reference to Hegel's '*Hic Rhodus, hic saltus*' from the preface to *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (*EPR*, 21; *GW*, 14,1: 15), Žižek makes two very interesting moves. First, he maintains that retroactive temporality is the specific factor to blame for the Hegelian philosopher's avowed congenital blindness to the yet-to-come. In Žižek's account, the after-the-fact, deferred action of the present and future on the past is precisely what dictates the impossibility of leaping forward through foresight into a God's-eye, view-from-nowhere, end-of-time perspective on 'objective history,' whatever that would be.

Second, Žižek rebuts a woefully commonplace story—this is the one according to which Hegel hubristically promotes a delusional 'theory of everything' enclosing all of reality under the sun in a fixed and frozen necessitarian framework—by turning the particular feature prompting the narration of this story (that is, the [apparent] closure of the Hegelian System) into the very means of refuting it. To be more exact, Žižek's tactic appropriately mobilizes a dialectical-speculative convergence of opposites in which the closed and the open coincide with each other. In this case regarding Hegel's philosophy of history, the totalizing closure of the past enacted by the present (that is, by the flight of the Owl of Minerva on a given evening) necessarily cannot but leave unseen and untouched the openness of the future (that is, the dawn of the next day). The closed character of systematic *Geschichtsphilosophie* simultaneously signals the insurmountably, indissolubly open character of the *à venir*. Additionally, another favorite Žižekian reference hovers in the wings here: Lacanian analyst Octave Mannoni's famous encapsulation of the logic of fetishistic

disavowal (that is, Freudian *Verleugnung*<sup>41</sup>) with the line ‘*je sais bien, mais quand même...* [I know full well, but nonetheless...].’<sup>42</sup> In this instance, Hegel is not so much ‘the most sublime of hysterics’ (as Žižek has it on multiple other occasions), but, rather, the most sublime of fetishists. That is to say, Žižek’s version of the Hegelian philosopher of history knows full well (that the yet-to-come is unpredictably open, that this invisible future retroactively will alter the visible past and present, that the current closure of the systematized historical whole will be shattered and reconfigured by the *à venir*, that seeming historical necessities are both created and destroyed by contingencies, and so on), but nonetheless... (remembers the past in a present totalizing recollection, recounts the progressive march forward of rational world history, discerns with hindsight prior teleological trajectories necessitating in advance the contemporary conjuncture...).

At this point, I wish to voice some Hegelian reservations as regards these two admittedly innovative and insightful maneuvers by Žižek. To begin with, I think Hegel might object to Žižek’s insistence that temporal retroactivity is the particular cause responsible for rendering ‘the future a priori unpredictable.’ Why? Ultimately, this has to do with the fundamental architectonic of Hegel’s System. This System, whose nucleus is formed by the entirety of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, is divided into *Logik* and *Realphilosophie*, the latter being subdivided into *Naturphilosophie* and *Geistesphilosophie*. For Hegel, *Geschichtsphilosophie* is a branch of *Geistesphilosophie*. The structures and dynamics of historical temporality in which retroactivity features centrally—again, they are what Žižek appeals to as resulting in the future’s constitutive unpredictability—are ingredients of *Geschichtsphilosophie*.

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<sup>41</sup> Sigmund Freud, *SE*, 17: 85, 19: 143–144, 184–185, 253, 23: 203; Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1973), 118–121. Citations of Freud refer to *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols, ed. and trans. James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953–74). References to the standard edition are given by the abbreviation *SE*, volume and page number.

<sup>42</sup> Octave Mannoni, ‘*Je sais bien, mais quand même...*’ in *Clefs pour l’Imaginaire ou l’Autre Scène* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969), 9–33; Adrian Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 92; and *LTN*, 983.

Thus, in Hegelian eyes, Žižek is in danger of riding roughshod over Hegel's distinction between the Logic and the Philosophy of the Real. The more-than-categorical concept of time per se (initially as objectively real time in pre/non-spiritual nature) does not come on the systematic scene for Hegel until the beginning of *Realphilosophie*, specifically as the second moment of *Naturphilosophie*.<sup>43</sup> Properly human historical time, as yet another, even richer more-than-categorical concept, does not arise in the System until the penultimate subdivision of the entire *Encyclopedia*, namely 'Section II: Mind Objective [*Der objektive Geist*]' of the *Philosophy of Mind*.<sup>44</sup> The crucial upshot in this context is that, in light of these architectonic considerations, Hegel likely would contend, *pace* Žižek, that the non-/pre-temporal and a-/trans-historical interrelations between the logical categories of the modalities is the ultimate *Ur-cause* of the *a priori* unpredictability of the future. In particular, the pivotal place of contingency at both the (baseless) base of actuality and between actuality and actuality's own possibilities—and, as both Hegel and Žižek maintain, any necessity is only ever a secondary consequence of these other, more foundational modalities—means that no one possibility or set of possibilities, as not-yet-but-potentially-actual, can be deemed necessary along predictable, deterministic lines (CPC). Insofar as the historical temporalities of objective spirit (*objektive Geist*) are, as are all things in Hegelian *Realphilosophie*, essentially and immanently formed by absolute idealism's categories, the unforeseeable nature of the future *vis-à-vis* the past and present is an effect or manifestation of the logical modalities. Exclusively thereby, at the level of *Logik*, is one entitled to uphold, as Žižek does, a specifically *a priori* (*qua* trans-historical) status for the future's anti-fatalistic defiance of predictions. Yet Žižek, as seen, implicitly inverts the Hegelian order of priority between Logic and the Philosophy of the Real, identifying the temporal retroaction of future history as the cause and basis of the non-necessity arguably central to Hegel's System precisely as

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<sup>43</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature: Being Part Two of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 33–40, §257–259; *GW*, 20: 247–251.

<sup>44</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind: Being Part Three of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. A.V. Miller and William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 241–243, §483–486; *GW*, 20: 478–481.

(according to Žižek himself, among others) a philosophy of contingency *par excellence*. Incidentally, Hegel's treatment of the categories of cause and effect—in 'The Doctrine of Essence,' this treatment, in which effect causes its cause to be a cause (*SL*, 559, 562–563; *GW*, 11: 397–398, 400–401),<sup>45</sup> follows promptly on the heels of the discussion of the modalities—constitutes a logical condition for the real-philosophical retroaction of human historical time (doing so along with the dialectical-speculative logic of contingency and necessity).

Setting aside the question of whether and when one should remain faithful to whatever counts as a present-best reconstruction of Hegel's thinking, an authentic debate indeed could be had about the pros and cons of Žižek's tacit reversal of relations between *Logik* and *Realphilosophie* (a reversal in which, as just witnessed, logical categories are the by-products, rather than essential forms, of historical processes). That said, I strongly suspect that this inversion reflects two aspects of Žižek's twentieth-century French intellectual background. First, the post-Kojévian reception of Hegel in France, due to Alexandre Kojève's own privileging of the more anthropological and historical dimensions of Hegelian *Phänomenologie* exhibits a tendency toward elevating *Geistesphilosophie* over *Logik* (even sometimes flirting with the gesture of treating the latter as an overdetermined outgrowth of the former) (*AR*, 238–239). As noted, Žižek indeed appears to make the logical modal categories determined results (instead of determining forms/essences) of human historical temporalities. Second, Lacan, a figure arguably at least as important for Žižek as Hegel, places special emphasis on temporal retroaction (as the *après-coup*, the future anterior, and so on) through his radicalizations of Freud's *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action). Žižek's stress upon this motif in his spirited defense of Hegel against certain hackneyed critical refrains is perhaps a symptom of the influence of this Lacanian emphasis. Also apropos temporality, Žižek goes so far in his recent Hegelian meditations as to equate negativity *à la* Hegel directly with time (*LTN*, 629, 866). But, within Hegel's System proper, time is

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<sup>45</sup> See also *The Encyclopedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, and H.S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 227–230, §153–154; *GW*, 20: 170–173; *Lectures on Logic: Berlin, 1831*, trans. Clark Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008) 167–169.

only one of many species of the genus negativity. Since time per se does not arise until the start of *Realphilosophie* with *Naturphilosophie* (time being the second determination/moment of the latter), Hegel would resist conflating strictly logical negativity with anything temporal.

If Hegel were alive today, I am confident he would not be an orthodox, to-the-letter-of-the-text Hegelian. To be more exact, I believe that a contemporary, resurrected Hegel would see fit to significantly revise substantial swathes of his *Realphilosophie* in particular. Confronted with the past two centuries of scientific and historical developments, Hegel's early nineteenth century *Naturphilosophie* and *Geistesphilosophie* clearly require updates, modifications, and even, in certain instances, profound overhauls (Žižek acknowledges this too, especially with respect to post-Hegelian science and psychoanalysis [see the main places where he does: *LTN*, 440–442, 449, 455–458, 461–463, 484–485, 490, 492–493; *AR*, 29–31, 34, 183–186, 199, 202]). I have little doubt that Hegel himself would be ready, willing, and able to undertake such broad and deep revisions of his Philosophy of the Real.

But when it comes to his *Logik*, I am equally confident that Hegel would stick to his original guns. *Realphilosophie* is conditioned by and sensitive to the more-than-logical Real *qua* the *a posteriori*, empirical, experiential, historical, and the like. It is the Philosophy of the Real specifically that Hegel famously describes, in the preface to *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (with *Rechtsphilosophie* as a branch *Geistesphilosophie*, itself a branch of *Realphilosophie*), as '*its own time comprehended in thoughts* [inhrer Zeit in Gedanken erfaßt]' (*EPR*, 21; *GW*, 14,1: 15). In this same preface, he implicitly contrasts this depiction of philosophy with the 'fully developed [*ausführlich entwickelt*]' execution of 'science,' namely *Wissenschaft als Wissenschaft der Logik* (*EPR*, 10; *GW*, 14,1: 5–6). Now, *Logik*, although its explicit emergence is enabled by historical forces and factors—the introductory role of the entire *Phenomenology of Spirit* in relation to the Logic and System as a whole is one among many pieces of evidence for this enabling<sup>46</sup>—allegedly achieves independence from

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<sup>46</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *PS*], trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 1, 3–4, 20, 22, 50–52; *GW*, 9: 9, 11–12, 29, 30, 56–58. See also *SL*, 34, 48–49, 53–54; *GW*, 21: 12–13, 32–33, 37–38.

these catalysts. In this vein, Hegel makes several connected claims for his Logic: It forms a seamlessly integrated network/web of categories that are simultaneously ontological and epistemological; this network/web amounts to an exhaustive totality; no further new logical categories remain to be discovered or invented; any future revisions to this Logic would (and should) be minor refinements at the level of presentation rather than major revisions at the level of substance (*SL*, 31, 42, 54, 63–64; *GW*, 21: 10, 20, 38, 48–49).<sup>47</sup> These claims establish a sharp, glaring contrast between the open incompleteness of *Realphilosophie* and the closed completeness of *Logik*.

Furthermore, the Logic makes knowledge of the Real possible both epistemologically and ontologically. *Logik* appears before *Realphilosophie* in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* precisely because the former, as metaphysics (that is, as a systematically integrated ontology and epistemology), plays this transcendental role with respect to the latter (that is, *Realphilosophie*). Additionally, although, for Hegel, the historical future of the human *Geist* is *a priori* unpredictable, it definitely is not, once it arrives as actually here-and-now, *a priori* unknowable. Hegel's Kant critique—Hegel rejects the finitism of Kant's subjectivist transcendental idealism, with its interlinked 'limits of possible experience' and thing-in-itself—entails the (notorious) 'infinite' of the *Begriff/Idee*. Properly comprehended, the Concept/Idea is infinite not as having attained 'Absolute Knowledge' by digesting all of reality without any leftovers—Hegel is careful to speak of 'Absolute Knowing' (*das absolute Wissen* as a kinetic verb), not 'Absolute Knowledge' (as a static noun)—but, instead, as not being finite in the sense of limited in advance by any alterity or transcendence (that is, a Kantian-style *Ding an sich*) forever insurmountably refractory by essential nature to the incursions of categorially determined, conceptually mediated knowing. Real-philosophical knowing is always in (metaphysical) principle infinitely expandable *vis-à-vis* the Real itself, although never in (historical) fact infinitely expanded (*ŽO*, 125–268). In tandem with Hegel's assertions apropos the history-generated-but-history-transcending status of his Logic, future history,

<sup>47</sup> See also *The Encyclopedia Logic*, 33, §9, 37–39, §12–15, 56, §24; *GW*, 20: 49, 52–56, 67–68; *Lectures on Logic*, 3.

as the spiritual yet-to-come, is logically guaranteed ahead of time to be both cognizable and cognized, to be a conceptually intelligible reality conforming to the systematically, scientifically established configurations of the logical categories. In the Hegelian encyclopedic framework, this future, including its retroaction upon the past and present, invariably can be recognized and registered again and again solely because of the Logic's priority over the Philosophy of the Real. Žižek's inversion of this priority inadvertently risks turning futurity into a quite anti-Hegelian noumenal 'x.' His reversal at least allows for the possibility, which Hegel does not, of the invisible, inaudible arrival(s), however sooner or later and frequently or infrequently, of an unrecognizable and unregisterable future.

Žižek, as already observed, rightly opposes the Hegel of the preface to *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, with the Owl of Minerva as 'a *child of its time*' (EPR, 21; GW, 14,1: 15), to all those Marxists who claim predictive powers for historical materialism as regards the socioeconomic *à venir*. However, and on the basis of my preceding Hegelian criticisms of Žižek's Hegel interpretation, I feel justified in maintaining that he is in danger of rendering this contrast between Hegelianism and Marxism excessively stark. One way to put this reservation is to say that (with reference back to the prior block quotation from *Less Than Nothing*) Hegel's negative propositions about the future in the preface to *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* are not (just) 'negative/limiting statements,' as Žižek has it, but instead (or also) positive statements about futurity as the potent power of negativity especially in relation to the being-there/existence of the *status quo*.

This point can be driven home compellingly with reference to a detail from Hegel's *Rechtsphilosophie* featuring centrally in the Žižekian playing off of Hegel against Marx, namely, the *Pöbel*. As I explain in a review of Ruda's book *Hegel's Rabble*:

Hegel suggests that the economic and political dynamics resulting in poverty, itself functioning as a breeding ground for the rabble mentality, are inherent to the then-new political economies of modernity (of course, he also highlights how the steadily widening gap between poverty and wealth under capitalism creates a corresponding rabble mentality in the rich, who come to believe that their gains contingently gotten through gambling on

civil society's free markets absolve them of duties and obligations *vis-à-vis* the public spheres of the *polis*). Moreover, on Hegel's assessment, no modern society (yet) appears to be willing and able adequately to address this internally generated self-undermining factor of rabble-rousing impoverishment. Without doing so, these historically youthful collective systems are at risk of destroying themselves sooner or later. Hence, rather than marking a pseudo-Hegelian 'end of history,' such societies, Hegel insinuates, have a very uncertain future ahead of them.<sup>48</sup>

I continue:

As is common knowledge, the preface to the 1821 *Philosophy of Right* characterizes philosophy as 'the Owl of Minerva' which spreads its wings solely at dusk, when the deeds and happenings of the day are done. In the same context, Hegel emphasizes that the philosopher is limited to gathering up materials furnished to him/her by the past and the present, constrained to conceptually synthesize his/her *Zeitgeist* and nothing more beyond this. Like the 'angel of history' in Walter Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' the philosopher—Hegel doubtlessly includes himself here—always has his/her back turned towards an unpredictable future (and this by contrast with the Marxist historical materialism soon to follow in Hegel's wake).<sup>49</sup>

Finally, I add:

Given that the problem of the rabble is underscored in the text prefaced by these very remarks, the radical leftist Hegelian conclusion that, even for the author of the *Philosophy of Right*, capitalism faces the prospect of eventually doing fatal violence to itself at its own hands is hardly unreasonable as a defensible exegesis of Hegel's socio-political thinking. The defensibility of this is further reinforced substantially by the fact that Hegel, also in the preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, explicitly stipulates that the ability of philosophy to sublimate the material of its times in thoughts signals the entering into decay and dissolution of the realities thus sublated; the sun must

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<sup>48</sup> Adrian Johnston, 'A Review of Frank Ruda's *Hegel's Rabble*,' *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 2012, <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/31707-hegel-s-rabble-an-investigation-into-hegel-s-philosophy-of-right/>.

<sup>49</sup> Johnston, 'A Review of Frank Ruda's *Hegel's Rabble*'.



be setting when the wise owl takes flight. Consequently and by his own lights, Hegel's capacity to distill the essence of capitalist modernity heralds that the bourgeois social order of his age already is on its way off the stage of history. Taking into account the multiple connections between Hegel and Marx, the Hegelian *Pöbel* might very well represent, within the confines of the *Philosophy of Right*, those who will unchain themselves one fine day in order to expedite capitalism's twilight labor of digging its own grave.<sup>50</sup>

The rabble is symptomatic of an internally self-generated negativity of capitalist modernity, of a real, true actuality (*als Wirklichkeit*) at work within this conjuncture, corroding it and, in so doing, heralding its imminent implosion. Hence, this *Pöbel* might very well be a (if not the) 'rose in the cross of the present [*die Rose im Kreutze der Gegenwart*],' the very spot for reveling so as to welcome the immanently arising future on its eve ('*Here is the rose, dance here* [*Hier ist die Rose, hier tanze*])' (*EPR*, 22; *GW*, 14,1: 15). Curiously, in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel associates *Wirklichkeit* with 'the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk' (*PS*, 27; *GW*, 9: 35).

With a surreptitiousness and circumspection understandable on the part of a prominent public intellectual with an official post under the repressive pressure of a reactionary government authority suffused with suspicion, Hegel, *circa* 1821, is forecasting, in coded, censor-evading fashion, the coming negation of this conservative state of affairs. Such conservatism, built on German nationalist resistance (aroused in the 'Wars of Liberation'/'Napoleonic Wars') to the progressivism of the French Revolution as incarnated by Napoleon, is a non-actual *Dasein/Existenz* resisting in futility the prevailing currents of the undertow, 'the inner pulse,' of historical *Wirklichkeit*. In his contemporaneous Berlin lectures on the *Philosophy of History*, Hegel is unambiguous in his lyrical celebration of the French Revolution as 'a glorious mental dawn [*ein herrlicher Sonnenauf*]'<sup>51</sup>—which should be read in tandem with that moment

<sup>50</sup> Johnston, 'A Review of Frank Ruda's *Hegel's Rabble*'.

<sup>51</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 447; *Werke in zwanzig Bänden. Auf der Grundlage der Werke von 1832–45 neu edierte Ausgabe*, vol. 12, eds E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 529.

in Hegel's correspondence when he avows that 'I am daily ever more convinced that theoretical work accomplishes more in the world than practical work. Once the realm of representation [*Vorstellung*] is revolutionized, actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] will not hold out.'<sup>52</sup>

All of this is to say that Žižek perhaps exaggerates the width of the divide between Hegelian *Geschichtsphilosophie*/*Rechtsphilosophie* and Marxian historical materialism. As the preface to *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* also shows (*EPR*, 21; *GW*, 14,1: 14–15), Hegel certainly is against unphilosophically and vainly micro-managing the empirical details of socio-historical arrangements ahead of time (the examples of this he gives are Plato's advice to nurses on physically handling children and J.G. Fichte's rationalizations regarding the design of passports). In Žižek's favor, this indeed suggests a principled refraining on Hegel's part from uttering empirically contentful and detailed predictions about specific aspects of yet-to-transpire social history (unlike, for instance, vulgar Marxist partisans of supposedly 'scientific' socialism). But, not in Žižek's favor, Hegel, however subtly and covertly, appears to invest himself, like Marx after him, in the prediction that the socio-historical *Sittlichkeit* of modern capitalism will, at the hands of the rabble, commit suicide in the not-too-distant future (just as the ethical order of ancient Greece did 'violence to itself at its own hands' along specific fault lines of collective tension reflected in Sophocles's *Antigone* and Plato's *Trial and Death of Socrates* [*PS*, 51, 267–289; *GW*, 9: 63, 241–260]<sup>53</sup>). Both the *Pöbel* and, in the preface to *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, the indication that Hegel's ability to capture capitalist modernity in philosophical thoughts signifies that this socioeconomic order already is dying amount to Hegel discerning a limit to his present. As Žižek himself underscores, two types of limit are operative in Hegelian philosophy: *Grenze* ('a simple external limit [...] I don't even perceive [...] as a limitation since I have no access to any

<sup>52</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, 'Hegel to Niethammer: Bamberg, October 28, 1808,' in *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 179.

*Briefe von und an Hegel*, vol. 1, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1952–1960), 253.

<sup>53</sup> See also G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (New York: The Humanities Press, 1955), 425–448. These lectures, based on Michelet's second edition, are not included in the *Werke*, which uses the superior first.

external point with which to compare it') and *Schranke* ('[w]hen *Grenze* changes into *Schranke*, it becomes a limitation proper, an obstacle I am aware of and try to overcome') (*AR*, 351–353). Precisely in the mode of a *Schranke*, Hegel's Logic posits a limitation to any existent actuality by its immanent possibilities (CPC) and, what is more, his Philosophies of Spirit, History, and Right posit an imminent limitation to his present socio-historical situation (that is, modern capitalism). Especially as regards the latter, Hegel clearly sees himself as one step ahead (but one step only) of his *Zeitgeist*. For him, the immediate, impending socio-historical future is at least minimally a *Schranke* rather than a *Grenze*.

Admittedly, Hegel, unlike Marx and company, does not treat this imminent and immanent dialectical negation of capitalist modernity as a 'determinate negation' (*PS*, 36, 51; *GW*, 9: 42, 57; *SL*, 53–54; *GW*, 21: 37–38)<sup>54</sup> whose destruction is simultaneously the creation of a subsequent socialist and communist historical future. Again, he neither forecasts far off into later, yet-to-arrive stages of social history nor fabricates fleshed out visions of the nitty-gritty concreteness of *die sittliche Zukunft*. Nonetheless, and *contra* Žižek, Hegel slyly anticipates the negation of his particular socio-historical *status quo* in the near-term future. Although whether a phoenix will rise and, if so, what kind of bird this will be—this phoenix of the future would be the close avian relative of the Owl of Minerva—are issues about which Hegel is deliberately silent, he definitely anticipates, subtly but firmly, that at the very least there soon will be ashes.

What is more, Hegel's Logic, starting with its third categorial moment of Becoming in 'The Doctrine of Being' (a moment subsequently enriched in 'The Doctrine of Essence' by its acquisition of actuality with the modalities of contingency, possibility, and necessity [CPC]), indicates that the categorial structuring of the Real by dialectical-speculative Logic *qua* metaphysics essentially inclines this Real (especially the historical temporalities of *Geist*) in the direction of ceaselessly restless transformations. Given that this inclination is logical (that is, trans-historical), this entails the expectation of such recurrent alterations being perpetual off into the future (although the determination of the exact cadences of such recurrences is left open). There might be something worth salvag-

<sup>54</sup> See also *The Encyclopedia Logic*, 35, §11, 131–132, §82; *GW*, 20: 51–52, 120; Hegel, *Lectures on Logic*, 79–80.

ing in Engels's much-derided, Marx-inspired identification of Hegelian philosophy's 'rational kernel' with the theories of change(s) put forward in the guise of speculative dialectics.<sup>55</sup> But, given my complete agreement with Žižek that the main thing to be combatted is the propagandistic cartoon picture of Hegel as an absurd, antiquated, Leibnizian-style hyper-rationalist, I am sympathetic to Žižek's recommendation that it would be better and more accurate to speak of recovering the 'irrational core' (that is, contingency, facticity, groundlessness, and the like) dwelling at the center of Hegel's System (*LTN*, 525).

Before moving towards a conclusion here, I want to do justice to some additional, illuminating reflections on matters teleological by Žižek. In *Less Than Nothing*, he states:

Hegel's dialectic itself is not yet another grand teleological narrative, but precisely an effort to avoid the narrative illusion of a continuous process of organic growth of the New out of the Old; the historical forms which follow one another are not successive figures within the same teleological frame, but successive re-totalizations, each of them creating ('positing') its own past (as well as projecting its own future). In other words, Hegel's dialectic is the science of the gap between the Old and the New, of accounting for this gap; more precisely, its true topic is not directly the gap between the Old and the New, but its self-reflective redoubling—when it describes the cut between the Old and the New, it simultaneously describes the gap, within the Old itself, between the Old 'in-itself' (as it was before the New) and the Old retroactively posited by the New. It is because of this redoubled gap that every new form arises as a *creation ex nihilo*: the Nothingness out of which the New arises is the very gap between the Old-in-itself and the Old-for-the-New, the gap which makes impossible any account of the rise of the New in terms of a continuous narrative. (*LTN*, 272–273)

A few pages later, Žižek, in a passage that also makes a modified reappearance in *Absolute Recoil* (234–235), links this to Hegel's doctrine of the modalities:

Hegel has [...] a lot to teach us about the topic of possibility versus actuality. What is involved in a dialectical analysis of, say, a past event,

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<sup>55</sup>Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, 11–13.

such as a revolutionary break? Does it really amount to identifying the underlying necessity that governed the course of events in all their apparent confusion? What if the opposite is true, and dialectical analysis *reinserts possibility into the necessity of the past*? There is something of an unpredictable miraculous emergence in every passage from 'negation' to 'negation of negation,' in every rise of a new Order out of the chaos of disintegration—which is why for Hegel dialectical analysis is always the analysis of *past* events. No deduction will bring us from chaos to order; and to locate this moment of the magical turn, this unpredictable reversal of chaos into Order, is the true aim of dialectical analysis. (*LTN*, 285)

Subsequently, in *Less Than Nothing*, the above is once again tightly tied to the theme of (temporal) retroaction (*LTN*, 468). Apropos teleology, the key thesis of these just-quoted passages is that teleological trajectories (seem to) exist exclusively with the benefit of hindsight, from the perspective of the Owl of Minerva's backwards glance. As Žižek puts it here, 'for Hegel dialectical analysis is always the analysis of *past* events.' And, as I put it elsewhere (at some length):

Hegel [...] *contra* prevailing interpretive orthodoxy, is not the crude teleological thinker he's all too frequently made out to be [...] To take the example of the *Phenomenology*, which, as Hegel's first *magnum opus*, sets the stage for much of the rest of his later philosophizing, it appears therein that a deep, irresistible current of progress functions as an undertow carrying the figures of non-philosophical consciousness along a preordained pathway leading to the telos of philosophical 'Absolute Knowing.' Moreover, this odyssey seems to be laid out in a particular order of stages and phases forming a fixed, necessary sequence through which consciousness is condemned to journey under the pre-arranged schedule of an always already established logical/metaphysical itinerary. But, the case can be made that, for Hegel, nothing guarantees in advance that progress will occur. Any progress is an after the fact effect to be discerned only retroactively (and whose temporally antecedent causes are contingencies); any necessity, as the preface to the *Philosophy of Right* spells out with pointed frankness, can be seen solely by the Owl of Minerva. Stated with greater precision, in the *Phenomenology*, a dialectically self-generated deadlock or impasse afflicting a shape of consciousness does not contain within itself

the promise of the fated actual arrival of a progressive step Beyond *qua* a resolution or exit. The immanent critiques of themselves these shapes produce, as determinate negations in the technical Hegelian sense, merely outline what a resolution/exit could be if—this ‘if’ arguably is a matter of conditional contingency rather than teleological necessity—a new figure of consciousness, one fulfilling what is demanded in terms of a resolution/exit, happens to come along in the future course of time. The dialectical self-subversions of consciousness, through their immanent determinate negations of themselves, just sketch the rough contours of what a possible solution to the problems they create for themselves would have to look like if such a solution arrives unpredictably one fine day. In other words, the thus-generated foreshadowings of subsequent progress, in the guise of approximate criteria for what would count as moving forward past specific cul-de-sacs, do not have the authoritative power to assure, as a matter of a simplistic teleology, the popping up in factual reality of realized escapes from these quagmires. Whether or not consciousness remains stuck is, ultimately, a matter of chance, left up to the caprice of the contingent.<sup>56</sup>

Žižek and I concur that a cardinal feature of Hegelian thinking is the appreciation of the lack of links of necessitation from *Wirklichkeit* to *Wirklichkeit* (CPC). Between any two (or more) consecutive actualities (with their accompanying beings-there/existences), there are multiple actually possible possibilities, no one of which is non-contingently necessary in the standard sense (CPC). Even in the limit case of the efficient causality of inorganic mechanics/physics, in which an antecedent actuality (that is, a cause) necessitates one and only one consequent actuality (that is, an effect), this necessity itself (that is, the causal law of nature *qua* necessary connection) is contingent *à la* the contingency of necessity; no meta-necessity, such as the sufficient reason(s) of a Leibnizian God, supplements the necessity of natural laws with the purposive final cause(s) of a teleology (CPC).

When Žižek, as quoted above, proposes that, ‘dialectical analysis *reinserts possibility into the necessity of the past*,’ this is tantamount to a two-fold insistence. On the one hand, the past as it was really is necessary

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<sup>56</sup>Johnston, ‘The Voiding of Weak Nature,’ 146–147.

for the present as it is, with the historical then becoming, through the *Nachträglichkeit/après-coup* of the future anterior, the necessary teleological pre-sequence eventuating in the contemporary now (this being the very real ‘*necessity of the past*’). On the other hand, this same ‘*necessity of the past*’ is itself contingent, and this for two reasons: first, the concatenation of prior actualities is a chain assembled on the basis of the successive actualizations of non-necessary, one-among-many possibilities between actualities (CPC); second, each after-the-fact, visible-exclusively-in-hindsight teleology is relative to the present of a situated backwards glance—with unpredictable, contingent future presents promising retroactively to alter or overturn altogether such teleologies through positing their own new teleologies (CPC). As Žižek puts this, ‘[t]here is something of an unpredictable miraculous emergence in every passage from “negation” to “negation of negation,” in every rise of a new Order out of the chaos of disintegration.’

However, the second half of the block quotation above from my ‘The Voiding of Weak Nature’ marks a divergence between Žižek and me. Combining this quoted content with much of the preceding analysis here, Hegel looks, on my interpretation of him, to navigate subtly between the Scylla of the complete blindness to the future Žižek’s reconstruction ascribes to him and the Charybdis of the delusional clairvoyance feigned by scientific-socialist vulgarizations of Marx’s historical materialism. To paraphrase the Benjamin of ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ (with his ‘*weak* messianic power’<sup>57</sup>), Hegel’s Philosophy of History, undergirded, like the entirety of *Realphilosophie*, by the Logic, modestly claims for itself a weak predictive power—something in between the polar extremes of either the false humility of no predictive power or the equally false hallucination of strong predictive power. On my reading, Hegel, at least with respect to the historical actuality of his specific context in the 1820s (if not more generally), lays claim to very limited foresight (but foresight nevertheless) as regards two things: first, an imminent demise of the *status quo* to be brought about by negativities internal to and already operative within this same situation (such as the increasing tensions between

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<sup>57</sup> Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History,’ 254; Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations*, xiii–xvi and *Prolegomena*, vol. 2.

modern societies and their growing rabbles); second, an apprehension, based on the aforementioned conjuncture-immanent negativities, of what would count as subsequent rational progress. To be more precise, this rational progress would be a 'speculative' resolution of these dialectical negativities, if—this 'if' is a contingent conditional not guaranteed or necessitated by any preordained teleology—such a resolution is achieved eventually, if such an advance beyond the impasses of the present just so happens to occur in the future.

To stay with the example of Hegel's *Pöbel*, one could say that, even though the rabble is the unique instance in the entire Hegelian corpus of a problem mentioned by Hegel for which he offers no solution or even hint thereof, this instance establishes one of the criteria for what would count as socio-historically progressive by rational-*qua*-dialectical-speculative standards. The rabble embodies a problem that can become a determinate negation (rather than simple negation-as-destruction) of the present only if a future arrives in which this symptom and its underlying causes are more adequately addressed. Hence, with Hegel, deadlocks of a current actuality already foreshadow and outline the parameters of what an immediately succeeding future actuality would have to be were it (conditionally, contingently) to count as a genuine step beyond the blockages and limits of the *hic et nunc*. Although Hegel deliberately avoids preaching prophecies about necessary developments to come and/or concrete occurrences in the distant future, he still, for multiple systematic reasons logical and real-philosophical, indicates both, first, that his present is ailing and soon will die (modern capitalism ultimately will destroy itself thanks to the exponentially widening gap between rich and poor) as well as, second, what would count as an actually new form of life overcoming this old ailment if and when this new form of life surfaces in the future (a *Sittlichkeit* with an economy in which, in a way that seems to elude being envisioned in advance, capitalism's self-destructive socio-economic dynamics are tamed, domesticated, and surpassed). However near-sighted and uncertain of itself, this Hegelian weak predictive power is predictive power all the same.

I am convinced there is something to Žižek's assertion that Hegel has greater contemporary relevance in the early twenty-first century than Marx. In line with this Žižekian contention, I would maintain that



Hegel's weak predictive power *circa* the 1820s resonates with current circumstances much more than does Marx's dictum from the (in)famous 1859 'Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*' that 'mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve.'<sup>58</sup> This dictum (as well as the text in which it features) is emblematic of those moments in Marx when he, as a child of the Enlightenment, inadvertently paves the way for the not-so-secular theodicies of both Second International economism and Stalinist *diamat*. On this score, Hegel is closer to such twentieth century Marxists as the Benjamin of 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' the mature Jean-Paul Sartre of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, and the later Althusser of 'the aleatory materialism of the encounter'—these latter three, each in his own fashion, plead for a historical/dialectical materialism of contingency (as does Žižek) in tandem with their repudiations of the teleological necessitarianisms of both economism and Stalinism—than to Marx himself.

In fact, Hegel's philosophy in particular, taking into account both Žižek's and my somewhat differing interpretive efforts apropos Hegel, can be seen as especially and uncannily appropriate for capturing today's social, economic, and political conjunctural combinations of actualities and beings-there/existences. Žižek, in connection with his insistence that Hegelianism denies itself prophetic foresight, wisely cautions that:

...especially. as communists, we should abstain from any positive imagination of the future communist society. We are, of course, borrowing from the future, but how we are doing so will only become readable once the future is here, so we should not put too much hope in the desperate search for the 'germs of communism' in today's society. (*LTN*, 222–223)

Žižek and I agree that Hegel and all true Hegelians abstain as a matter of principle from making foolishly detailed long-term forecasts (such as 'any positive imagination of the future communist society'). Moreover, not only are there systematic Hegelian justifications at the

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<sup>58</sup> Karl Marx, 'Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*,' in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 390.

levels of both *Logik* and *Realphilosophie* for this abstention—a long string of losses, failures, and missed opportunities have made any kind of scientific-socialist strong messianic/prophetic power into a sad, antiquated fiction. A far from exhaustive list of these historical catastrophes includes, in addition to two Worlds Wars: 1848 (Europe's crushed workers' uprisings), 1871 (the bloodily defeated Paris Commune), 1918–1919 (the German Revolution, Spartacist Uprising, and consequent murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht), 1922 (Benito Mussolini becoming Italy's head of state), 1924 (Lenin's death as paving the way for Stalin's betrayal of the Bolshevik Revolution), 1929 (the non-materialization of leftist revolts in capitalist countries hit hard by the Great Depression), 1933 (Adolf Hitler's solidification of control over Germany), 1938/1939 (both the publication of Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* as well as his relationship with Hitler in the guise of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact), 1965–1967 (Suharto's overthrow of Sukharno in Indonesia and the mass slaughter of Indonesian communists and leftists), 1973 (Augusto Pinochet's coup against the government of Salvador Allende and the latter's ensuing death), 1978 (Deng Xiaoping's post-Mao reforms ushering in 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' partly inspired by Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew), 1979/1980 (Margret Thatcher's and Ronald Reagan's electoral mandates for their neoliberal counter-revolutions), 1983 (François Mitterrand's '*tournant de la rigueur*'), 1989 (the wheezing collapse of Really Existing Socialism), 1992/1997 (the victories of Bill Clinton's and Tony Blair's New Democrats/Labour as further consolidations via the pseudo-leftist 'Third Way' of neoliberalism's triumph)... Today looks just as bad, if not worse: skyrocketing wealth inequality not seen since before World War I; endless amounts of tax cuts and corporate welfare for the ultra-rich; equally endless amounts of disempowerment and dispossession for both the employed and unemployed masses alike; postmodern returns of late nineteenth-/early-twentieth-century-style big power imperialist rivalries and resultant violent conflicts; the fetid, toxic tide of far-right populisms, nationalisms, fundamentalisms, and racisms sloshing around the entire globe... Only the coldest of comfort is provided by Benjamin's speculation that '[e]very fascism is an index of a failed revolution.'

Contrary to Marx's 1859 hypothesis that 'mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve,' these discouraging lessons of the past two centuries seem unanimously to teach instead that the humanity represented by the Marxist tradition repeatedly sets itself tasks it is anything but ready, willing, and/or able to solve. Consequently, like Hegel in 1821 (on my reading of him), radical leftists nowadays find themselves uncomfortably stuck with a strange sort of antinomic parallax view (to employ a Žižekian turn of phrase): On the one hand, a viciously reactionary state of affairs looks to be in the process of unwittingly driving itself to internally generated destruction partly by virtue of phenomena common to the nineteenth and late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries (such as excessively grotesque and obscene wealth inequalities); on the other hand, nobody appears to be capable of articulating an actually possible and potentially feasible alternative order as a successor *Sittlichkeit* to the currently imploding socioeconomic reality. In short, a Hegelian leftist today can neither imagine the *status quo* continuing on into the future nor imagine it not continuing; it seems as though capitalism cannot go on and yet, simultaneously, cannot not go on.

Hegel's resolution, if it can be called such, of this parallax antinomy at the level of his *Realphilosophie* (as *Geschichtsphilosophie* and *Rechtsphilosophie*) is to gesture at the flickering shadow of the imminent self-wrought ruin cast by a specific feature of his times (in this instance, the *Pöbel*) while, at the same time, not gesturing at any concrete constellations of actualities and beings-there/existences *à venir*. And, at the level of Hegel's *Logik*, the interlinked negativities of becoming (*Werden*), contingent actualities (*Wirklichkeiten*), and possibilities (*Möglichkeiten*) repeatedly cast the penumbra of an imminent actuality-to-come onto a given actuality-that-is, a difficult-to-see penumbra nonetheless visible to certain discerning gazes (CPC).

Although I concur with Žižek's warning that 'we should not put too much hope in the desperate search for the "germs of communism" in today's society,' I also still believe that a properly Hegelian leftist can and should hold onto the germs of negativity within the present as sustaining sources of hope (however vague and tenuous), namely the currently

actual symptoms within the here-and-now of the imminent future actuality (CPC)—that is, the germs of anti-capitalism, although not of communism or even socialism. Perhaps Hegel’s advice to today’s leftists would be more or less the same as in the 1820s: here is the shadow of tomorrow, revel here. But be prepared for the likelihood a long, brutal hangover the morning after and, as Mao Tse-Tung would say, the probability (but not certainty) of near-to-medium-term defeat.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Mao Tse-Tung, ‘On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People,’ in *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tsetung* (Peking: Foreign Languages, 1971), 442–444, 446, 464; ‘Speech at the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee’ [September 24, 1962], [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8\\_63.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_63.htm); ‘Speech to the Albanian Military Delegation’ [May 1, 1967], [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9\\_74.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_74.htm); Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations*, 55–57.

# 11

## On the Difference Between Schelling and Hegel

S.J. McGrath

### 1 Introduction

The difference between Schelling and Hegel has been widely explored in the voluminous secondary literature of German Idealism. In this chapter I do not wish to so much evaluate that difference as to probe its presuppositions from a Schellingian perspective. In this way, I hope to show that Schelling's alternative to Hegel is neither irrational nor mystical, as it is often purported to be, but rather genuinely scientific.

In order to defend such a claim I first distinguish between *systematic thinking* and *system building*: the two do not necessarily coincide. All system building is systematic, but not all systematic thinking is system building. Where Hegel is the builder of *a* system, *the* system, Schelling builds, and apparently destroys, multiple systems throughout his career.

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As is often pointed out, this is because Schelling does not believe that the construction of a single system adequate to reality is possible. Every system is partial and to that degree inadequate to the whole. Yet Schelling is always systematic in what he does; there is no abjuring of reason in his refusal of a closed system. I contrast two alternative ways in which the refusal of system might indeed abjure reason: obscurantism and cynicism. Schelling is neither obscurantist nor cynical in his refusal of system. The question concerning the final and definite system always remains open for Schelling because thinking is historical, that is, contingent, and its history is not yet finished. This is perhaps the most important divergence of Schellingian philosophy from mainstream Hegelianism, which presumes just the opposite (the end of history).

It is in the interest of an open exploration of systematicity that Schelling refuses any rendering of the absolute as a secure possession of conceptual thinking (in particular, what he takes to be Hegel's view). The exteriority of the absolute to thinking is the reason why Schelling never arrogates to philosophy sovereignty over other forms of discourse, as does Hegel. Insofar as reason cannot explain its own existence, it never achieves the absolute. In the late Schelling this leitmotif of the poverty of reason generates a new figure for systematicity without system. Reason is most rational when it empties itself, renounces its triadic *a priori* concept of being as sufficient to the real, and understands itself to be dependent entirely on an outside.

Lastly, I will elaborate this kenosis of reason as the most distinctively un-Hegelian of concepts in the late Schelling, one that I will explicate by demonstrating it to be a reversal of the path followed by Descartes (and idealism in general).

## 2 A Thinking that Both Seeks and Refuses Closure

Unlike his contemporaries (Hegel, Schopenhauer), Schelling never created *a* system. He produced at least four different philosophical positions (nature-philosophy, philosophy of identity, philosophy of freedom, philosophy of revelation), with ambiguous if not contradictory relations among them. In the light of this internal diversity, one could, with

Schelling's contemporaries, question the coherence of his thinking. One could scoff at the eternal beginner who is always proposing a project, never completing one. Schelling, 'the Proteus of German Idealism,' is continually shifting his position and with ever-renewed resolve setting forth on yet another massive overhaul of the whole of philosophy, only to have the new effort founder just as surely as all of his previous attempts. If success in philosophy is measured in terms of capacity to produce a system and consistently defend and develop it in a variety of contexts, Schelling is the most unsuccessful of the German Idealists.

I believe this critique, however common, misses the mark in several important ways, not only concerning Schelling and his quality as a thinker, but also concerning philosophy, what it is and what it should be. Anyone who has spent any serious amount of time reading Schelling (by distinction from reading about him) will see that Schelling is one of the most consistent of thinkers. He may not build and defend one system, but his thinking is always systematic; that is, Schelling's thinking, in all of its wild variations, is governed by the canons of adequacy and coherence. Schelling strives above all to be adequate to that of which he speaks, be it nature, logic, or love, and if he does not succeed in re-constructing the subject matter in a system that demonstrates its intelligible relations to all that it contains, he never contradicts himself (to change one's mind is not necessarily to contradict oneself). Rather, Schelling always heeds what *must* be said on any given topic and why it cannot, in any given instance, be said otherwise.

The refusal of system is in itself neither a rational nor an irrational position. It could be motivated by obscurantism. Life is too infinitely mysterious for rational philosophy, the obscurantist declares; only the poets and the mystics can do it justice.<sup>1</sup> It might be motivated by cynicism—the smug judgment that all thought, language, and action, co-opted as they are by constitutive ideology, inevitably shipwreck in parallaxes.<sup>2</sup> But

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<sup>1</sup>The classic statement of obscurantism is found in the early Schleiermacher. See especially his *Speeches on Religion*, ed. and trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). But the position is now as common as esoteric bookstores.

<sup>2</sup>I have Slavoj Žižek in mind. See, for instance, *The Parallax View* (London: Verso, 2006). But cynicism is so widespread among philosophers and theorists today that it might be described as the reigning ideology of the intelligentsia. The essential difference between ancient and modern cyni-

the refusal of system could also be motivated by genuine philosophical humility: fidelity to both the imperatives of reason (adequacy and coherence) and the strangeness of things. No system of thought is possible because the truth of historical reality is not identical to the intelligibility of thought; the former exceeds the latter in both its excess of meaning and its unfinishedness and proves thought to be basically inadequate to the task of giving a full and comprehensive account of things. That thought cannot complete its task of giving an account of reality does not necessarily render it futile. This position I hold to be Schelling's. And far from being an obscurantist or cynical position, I believe it to be a basically scientific attitude. So did C.S. Pierce, who admired just this element of restless experimentation and self-critique in Schelling. In a letter to William James on 28 January 1894, Peirce confesses the depth of the influence of Schelling on his work: 'I consider Schelling as enormous, and one thing I admire about him is his freedom from the trammels of system, and his holding himself uncommitted to any previous utterance. In that, he is like a scientific man.'<sup>3</sup>

This distinction between obscurantism and cynicism, on the one hand, and a primordially scientific refusal of system on the other is crucial to sifting through the variety of contemporary responses to Schelling. The obscurantist and the cynic are in one sense opposed: For the obscurantist life is too richly meaningful for philosophy to be anything other than an idle exercise of ignorant rationalists; for the cynic, consciousness is too constitutively self-deceiving for philosophy to be anything other than self-reflexive critique, and one that can never stop because consciousness will always incline toward the safety and stability of a new ideology. The one finds life too meaningful for philosophy, the other, too meaningless. But obscurantism and cynicism share a position that sets them both against the primordially scientific attitude that I hold to be Schelling's. Both obscurantism and cynicism foreclose the range of questioning. Both

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cism is that the modern cynic, unlike the ancient cynic, sees no possibility for truthful speaking or virtuous action. Hence, modern cynicism is self-referential and endlessly, unproductively, critical. On the difference between ancient and modern cynicism, see Peter Soterdijs, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Joseph L. Esposito, *Schelling's Idealism and Philosophy of Nature* (Lewisburg Bucknell University Press, 1977), 203.



presume to definitively know something about the fit (or lack thereof) of truth and thought. The obscurantist says, definitively, and without qualification (as though speaking out of some privileged non-rational gnosis): Philosophical thought is always distortive of the real because it simply cannot handle it. The cynic says, just as definitively and without qualification, and with just as much presumption of secret access to the truth, precisely the same thing: Philosophical thought is always distortive of 'the real' because it simply cannot handle it. But where the obscurantist finds something to affirm in this—the excessively meaningful nature of reality—the cynic finds something to smugly mock—the comic ineptitude of our false consciousness. It might seem surprising to line up New Age gurus with professional critics of culture (Eckhart Tolle alongside Slavoj Žižek), but from a Schellingian perspective they indeed have much in common. Both presume to know something that Schelling would never claim to know. Both are manifestly lacking in the philosophical humility that refuses system for the same reason it refuses closure to thinking: because it refuses, in the light of historical being, any *a priori* limitation on the range of questioning.

There is no shortage of obscurantists and cynics alike in the contemporary philosophical scene. The obscurantists are easy to spot because they always end up affirming religion, poetry, or myth at the expense of reason and philosophy and seem to find some solace in this. The cynics are a bit more elusive because their arguments are more rigorous. For this reason, the cynics are much more helpful readers of Schelling, even if in the end they have Schelling just as dead wrong.

Let us consider, for example, Markus Gabriel, who has done more to demonstrate the rigor of Schelling's thinking than perhaps any other contemporary writer on Schelling. With a firm command of contemporary post-analytical philosophy, a fine logical mind, and the kind of scholarly mastery of the literature of idealism that one can only get in a German university, Gabriel stands head and shoulders above the older Schellingians, who could never seem to make any compelling point to anyone outside the closed circle of the *Internationale Schelling Gesellschaft*. Where the older generation fetishizes dates and page references, Gabriel springs lightly over the texts and brings Schelling's arguments into debates in contemporary metaphysics among English speaking philosophers who

have scarcely even heard of him. The effect is dramatic: giants of contemporary Anglo-American philosophy laid low by arguments lifted out of Schelling's *Philosophie der Mythologie* (carefully cleansed of theological commitment and formalized into the 'ordinary language' of Anglo-American philosophical institutions).

But make no mistake, Gabriel is a cynic, who fits in with Pippin, Brandom, and McDowell because he, just as emphatically as they, forecloses the range of questioning. And this is what must never happen according to Schelling. We cannot conceptually demonstrate the existence of God—or what amounts to the same thing for Schelling, the triumph of love over chaos—at least not with any finality. The divine, if it exists, necessarily eludes conceptual determination by the finite: it is non-determinate, and hence, by definition, outside the reach of concepts. But the very argument that places divinity outside finite thought also refuses the atheist any foreclosure on transcendence. Tragic immanentism presumes closure just as surely as classic onto-theology. The question concerning God always remains open for Schelling: Because thinking is historical, that is, because the context of thought is contingency, it is always an open question whether the world is an accident or a creation. It is in this very openness to the question that Schelling's philosophy, by contrast to Hegel's, is a philosophy of transcendence. And in the contemporary context, with theory equally divided between obscurantism and cynicism, this is why Schelling's critique of Hegel, that is, Schelling's philosophy of transcendence, still matters.

Gabriel sides with the deflationary reading of Hegel popular in Anglo-American philosophy. There is no absolute for Gabriel's Hegel in the sense of a divine principle or deity; the absolute is nothing other than thought discovering its own self-constituting activity. Hegel's denial of an absolute beyond to the world of appearances does not entail the claim, widely attributed to him, that reason is absolute or omniscient. By reading Hegel as a thinker of the finitude of reason, Gabriel is able to draw Hegel even closer to Schelling, who then beats Hegel at his own game. Both are tracking the circularity of thought: a critical reason that includes itself is a reason without an outside. Hegel is misunderstood, according to Gabriel, as an onto-theologian. The point of Hegel's dialectic is not to re-instate a theological narrative about the incarnation of the absolute,

in history, in thought, and in politics. Rather, the point is to deny the transcendence of the absolute entirely by redefining it not as the highest being or the creator but as thought's grasp of itself producing its own conditions of possibility. Anyone who successfully follows the dialectic, Hegel argues, experiences the absolute in his or her own thinking. 'The Hegelian concept is, thus, nothing more than his name for the attempt at a coherent higher-order metaphysics of intentionality, which allows for a dialectically stable metatheory.'<sup>4</sup>

The key move, according to Gabriel, is Hegel's undercutting of Kantian reflection. Hegel applies Kant's critique of transcendental subjectivity to critique itself, and the categories are revealed to be not brute facts, but the result of synthesis. Kant deprives thought of its ontological objectivity but retains the possibility of transcendent being, the thing-in-itself, of which we can say nothing. Hegel turns the theory of synthesis on critical philosophy itself and discovers that the in-itself is posited by thought precisely in its understanding of phenomena as only thus and so *for us*. Something can only be *for us* if it can also, at least conceptually, be *for itself*. Thought posits the in-itself in order to represent things for us. The dialectical relation of the in-itself and the phenomenal reveal that *nothing* transcends thought: The only candidate left for the absolute is the activity of thought grasping the circularity of reflection. Kant's mistake was not to include transcendental subjectivity in the critique, leaving it out as a trace of transcendence. For Hegel, transcendental subjectivity is not transcendent at all but immanent in the very act of producing meaning.

The crucial question then becomes: What is the status of thought thinking itself in this context? For one must surely distinguish thought thinking representations of things and finding them to be synthetic, that is, products of thought itself, and thought thinking itself thinking representations of things. In the former case, thought remains hidden from the critical operation, in the latter, thought de-constructs itself. But is thinking that self-de-constructs necessary or contingent? That is, are we to see in thought thinking itself a necessary movement, a thinking that

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<sup>4</sup> Markus Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology: Essays in German Idealism* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *TO*] (London, Bloomsbury, 2011), xvi.

in the absence of the older forms of transcendence (God, the soul, freedom) is the last man standing, the only one left to inherit the mantle of the absolute? Or are we to see in thought thinking itself a process that is as much a contingent product as are the representations of things? If the latter is the case, then thought thinking itself is as fragile and constructed as representational thinking and, in exactly the same way, shot through with contingency. Gabriel's point is that Hegel takes the more conservative former route and finds divinity in thought thinking itself, while Schelling takes the later route and finds in all reflection a hall of mirrors, an endlessly self-productive finitude. 'Where Hegel argues that necessity even governs contingency in that the very logical form of contingency is a necessary logical achievement, Schelling insists on the contingency of even that operation' (*TO*, 103).

According to Gabriel, it is in this sense, and not in any religious sense, that Hegel presumes a closure to the indeterminacy of meaning, which Schelling denies. That is, it is not because Schelling leaves open the possibility of a divinity beyond being, an excess of intelligibility, beyond thought thinking itself, that he is to be preferred to Hegel. If this is in fact an accurate reading of Schelling, it is a reading that fixates upon that in Schelling that is still mired in mythology and onto-theology. It is rather because Schelling thinks the contingency of thought without mitigating this contingency by finding necessity in the thought that thinks the contingency of thought. Contingency means that the process of unmasking contingency never rests in necessity and is driven always to question whatever ground it uncovers. The result is a more disenchanted and deflationary idealism than is realized by Hegel. Philosophy finds itself inevitably negotiating infinitely self-pluralizing domains of meaning, 'fields of sense,' because as the product of a contingent thinking of itself, thought cannot but be productive of meaning, but whatever meaning it produces will always lack the finality and fullness of the truth that it seeks. Hence philosophy is in perpetual motion, animated by an endlessness that is hardly consoling, even if keeps philosophers working.

Crucial here is Gabriel's refusal to see the possibility of a 'good' infinite (an infinity which lacks nothing) on the other side of the 'bad' infinity (an infinity outside of which there is always something) of a contingent thought endlessly reflecting on its own contingency. 'Being is nothing

other than a side effect of the transfinite, non-totalizable plurality of fields of sense. Being is not conceived in terms of something given in advance, it is not some metaphysical entity behind or beyond appearance. There is no underlying hidden reality, because there is only a plurality of fields of sense' (*TO*, xiv-xv). Or even more revealing: 'We can summarize the overall crucial ontological shift of modernity with the slogan that *Being becomes its own belated retrojection*: Being, the domain where everything, and therefore a plurality of fields of sense, takes place, only takes place as the imaginary whole generated from within a particular field of sense. Elsewhere, I have referred to this as the inevitability of "mythology"' (*TO*, xxix).

Let us not miss what has happened here. It is not only that Hegel, criticized for presuming closure to a process of thinking that can only be contingently endless, is rejected in favor of a thinker, Schelling, who refuses to close the circle of critique: the horizon of thinking is just as definitively foreclosed by Gabriel as it is by Hegel, for Gabriel will not permit any speculation on the possibility of a real other to reflection—call it God, the good infinite or the Good beyond being. And it is Gabriel, not Schelling, who forbids this restitution of transcendence. Schelling's whole career is in fact oriented toward thinking a genuinely other to thought. Even if he himself cannot achieve it in his own work, he recognizes such an aim as the end of philosophy (end as *eschaton* rather than *telos*). Schelling calls this fulfillment of thought 'philosophical religion' and is careful to defer it to an incalculable future so as to avoid any idealist deification of human thinking or apotheosis of the state. But Gabriel retreats exactly from this ultimate de-stabilization of philosophy; he will rather pronounce on what is and is not possible, not only for philosophy, but for human beings in an ultimate sense. The question of transcendent being is not left open but is just as emphatically decided by Gabriel as it is by Hegel, in favor of instituting human thinking in the place of the divine, albeit a constitutively self-elusive thinking. Gabriel never tells us by virtue of what privileged insight he is able to pronounce that there is no positively existing other to thought. It would appear that in the circles in which Gabriel moves, he needs no such argument. We all know that 'there is no Big Other,' that four millennia of Western religion, not to mention non-Western religion, is a massive lie, the master ideology of

history from which we late moderns have awakened. Be that as it may. My point is that the gesture of pronouncing ultimately on the nature and quality of the other to thought is profoundly un-Schellingian. Gabriel, in spite of a promising beginning, is merely another deflationary Hegelian, another advocate of a cynical foreclosure to the range of questioning, in short, a modern cynic.

To put the problem in more strictly logical terms, on what grounds can an essentially contingent thought declare the unsurpassable circularity of thought? If the circularity of thought is a fact, discovered in the course of trying to think a genuine other to thought, then it is a fact that, like all facts, might be otherwise. Thought discovers the possibility of a genuine other to thought in its very discovery of its circularity, even if it has no available means of actualizing the possibility. If the circularity of thought is not a discovered fact but a deduced truth, it is a necessary truth, and it is then *not* the case that everything we think is contingent. The latter is Gabriel's position. However dramatically he disavows it, Gabriel in effect argues for the necessity of contingency just as much as Hegel. Schelling's position, by contrast, affirms the contingency of necessity all the way down. Because the discovery of circularity is a fact, not a deduction, it might be otherwise. Because the fact is a product of a particular history of ideas, that history (the history of mythology, religion, and philosophy) cannot be ignored. A careful consideration of that history shows that the possibility of a genuine other to thought is everywhere affirmed and even in certain non-philosophical contexts declared to be historically actual. It is what in the West we have called "revelation".

### 3 A Path that Never Leads to Hegel

Hegel's favorite Schelling was the earliest Schelling, the writer of several influential treatises on *Naturphilosophie*, which Hegel himself analyzed superbly in his first book (the so-called *Differenzschrift*). Hegel was enthusiastic for how the early Schelling refutes both subjective idealism and dogmatism, while recounting a goal-oriented organic emergence of consciousness from the unconscious, a teleological evolution of self-conscious mind from material nature. Nature is slumbering mind, an

unconscious mode of spirit, which, as primordial origin, remains in a certain way inaccessible to what originates from it. Nature is the negative of consciousness but not for this reason outside mind. Hegel fixates on this Schelling in order to first of all refute the subjectivism of Descartes, and secondly and just as vigorously, to refute the objectivism of Spinoza. If mind is its own product and is produced dialectically in a process of self-reflection and self-negation, access to it can neither privilege reflection nor ignore it. A new method is needed, one that will grasp reflection itself as an object. The new method, the dialectic, will achieve the certainty and necessity sought by Descartes and Spinoza but without the one-sidedness of either.

By the time Schelling's 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism* appeared, Hegel had stopped reading him. This is Schelling's most Kantian work, and Kant will remain an important silent partner of Schelling's whole career. Kant claimed that subjectivity in itself could not be known; Schelling pointed out that Kant's transcendental analysis of the *a priori* forms by which subjectivity generates for itself a world of ethical law and intelligible matter is nothing other than an analysis of subjectivity in itself. One need only grasp that the subjectivity that Kant analyzes is free of the dualities that it generates (subject/object, freedom/necessity, ideality/ reality, mind/matter) to see that transcendental idealism had already broken through to the absolute, only it had not yet recognized that it had done so. The unconscious as 'the ground of lawfulness in freedom and of freedom in the lawfulness of the object'<sup>5</sup> is the basic theme of Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*. Where Kant posited freedom as the exclusion of necessity, Schelling argued that freedom and necessity, the ideal and the real, are two sides of one absolute reality, which can neither be exclusively identified with the free nor with the necessary, but which is indifferent to both and so can generate, on the one side, an ethical-cultural order, whose presupposition is freedom

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<sup>5</sup>F.W.J. Schelling, *The System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 209; SW, I/3: 600. Citations of Schelling provide the pagination of the English translation followed by that of the *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, 14 vols, ed. Karl Friedrich August Schelling (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J. G. Cotta, 1856–61). References to the K.F.A. Schelling edition are given by the abbreviation SW, division, volume and page number.

(moral law), and, on the other side, a natural order, whose presupposition is necessity (natural law).

While at this stage of his career Schelling had not yet broken through to speculative empiricism, one can nonetheless see in *The System of Transcendental Idealism* a decidedly different emphasis than is found in Hegel. The synthesis of the ideal and the real that Schelling posits in the absolute is never a secure possession of conceptual thinking: on the contrary, the absolute is basically outside philosophy. The artist, not the philosopher, is the one who is adequate to the intellectual intuition of the absolute, and he cannot explain what he knows: rather he performs it, unconsciously producing the synthesis in such a way as to surprise himself, not unlike a clairvoyant or a mystic who can only divine the truth of things to the degree that they are literally and figuratively 'out of their mind.' Philosophy is bounded by an outside and gestures towards it as that which renders its own interiority a merely finite perspective.

Soon after this period, Schelling will construct another philosophy in which reason in a new sense is deemed adequate to the absolute (the *Identitätsphilosophie*), but with the curious effect that it no longer knows anything about real history. Thus, the ideal-real polarity remains unmediated, even in the most idealistic moment of Schelling's career. The identity-philosophy may in fact be nothing other than an extended reduction ad absurdum, carried out for close to a decade over thousands of pages, of the assumption that intelligibility must be conceived *a priori*. One can only conceive intelligibility *a priori*, Schelling concludes, at the expense of reality itself. In the 1804 'Philosophy and Religion' essay Schelling argues that history, the real, the finite domain of contingent events, is basically incompatible with the absolute and can only be conceived on the assumption of a rupture with it. The point is that reason presumes a stable domain of eternal essences that infinitely express the absolute without remainder: an *a priori* philosophy thus can know nothing of facts, which have no necessary reason for existing. If there are such facts, cognition of them will not be speculative but will rather demand another point of access. In this way 'Philosophy and Religion' anticipates the later distinction between negative and positive philosophy: The former achieves apodicticity at the expense of historical reality; the latter knows historical reality, the domain of positive and



singular events, but without certainty or necessity. Hence, even in the early Schelling, the Hegelian identification of the real and the rational is everywhere avoided.

The signature Schellingian gesture is for philosophy to defer to the non-philosopher, the artist, the mystic, the apostle, not because he sees in him or her a higher philosophy—philosophy remains the authority on what is and is not philosophical—but because philosophy's highest act is to recognize its own limits, limits on the other side of which there may indeed be something but about which philosophy as such can have nothing to say. Schelling never arrogated to philosophy sovereignty over all other forms of discourse. The Hegelian, by contrast, always knows better than the theologian, the mystic, and the poet, even if he does not know otherwise. This clout and kiss approach to discourses other than philosophy is the source of the curious blend of domination and inclusion characteristic of Hegelian thought: Hegel in fact dominates a discourse by including it in his own as a sublated moment in the emergence of the true philosophy (his). Hegel claimed to have arrived at a position that could only be critiqued from 'outside' by a critic who failed to recognize the degree to which his or her own position is already a presupposition of Hegel's. We are to understand that otherness is the mere appearance of difference, that to find oneself in one's other (Hegel's preferred formulation of the absolute notion) is freedom, and freedom is reason. 'Spirit is, therefore, in its every act only apprehending itself, and the aim of all genuine science is just this, that spirit shall recognize itself in everything in heaven and on earth.'<sup>6</sup> Schelling will argue that, yes, without an inside, there is no outside, and yes, thinking tends towards the absolute annulling of the outside, the total domestication of the real. This is the core of 'negative philosophy,' which is the presupposition for 'positive philosophy' or the philosophy of transcendence. Indeed, negative philosophy is an inevitable production of reason. The essential thing is to see through negative philosophy to the positivity that it excludes. What is substituted for the real is *revealed* to be so laced with holes, so derivative, so bereft of real relations to beings and to other persons, that reason itself, if it is fully

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<sup>6</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind: Being Part Three of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. A.V. Miller and William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 2, §377.

reasonable, will limit itself, will refuse totality, will enjoin upon itself a healthy skepticism (Socratic rather than Pyrrhonian).

In the Berlin Lectures, Schelling explicitly rejects Hegel's presumption that philosophy could be an absolute discourse (sublated science, sublated religion), along with his own youthful effort at the same, in favor of a philosophy of transcendence. Schelling does not deny that reason sublates nature and that concepts seem to penetrate beings to their intelligible core. But why does reason exist? Whence intelligibility as such? The question is at least intelligible, for philosophy cannot coherently deny the existence of reason:

Everything can be in the logical Idea without anything being explained thereby, as, for example, everything in the sensuous world is grasped in number and measure, which does not thereby mean that geometry or arithmetic explain the sensuous world. The whole world lies, so to speak, in the nets of the understanding or of reason, but the question is how exactly it got into those nets, since there is obviously something other and something more than mere reason in the world, indeed there is something which strives beyond those barriers.<sup>7</sup>

This is the essence of Schelling's critique of Hegel: Insofar as reason cannot explain its own existence, it cannot claim complete explicatory power.

## 4 Kenosis of God/Kenosis of Reason

A first gesture towards what the later Schelling calls 'the ecstasy of reason' first appears in the 1810 *Stuttgart Seminars*. The early Schellingian absolute is here reiterated as the identity of subject and object, the real and the ideal. But now the absolute is regarded as merely a concept. Can it be affirmed to really exist?

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<sup>7</sup>F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 147; *SW*, I/10: 143–144.

Primordial being [*das Urwesen*] as the absolute identity of the real and the ideal is itself only subjectively posited, however we must grasp it objectively: it must not remain merely in itself but must also be the absolute identity of the real and the ideal outside itself, that is, it must reveal itself as such, actualize itself—it must show itself as such also in existence.<sup>8</sup>

The philosophical idea of the absolute is ‘subjective,’ a merely conceptual understanding of the identity of the real and the ideal. What is needed is a *real* experience of the absolute, not a concept or a proof, but an historical experience, a positive, radically empirical revelation of God. Clearly Schelling is not talking about traditional philosophical theology and the industry of proving God’s existence. The existence of God is no doubt logically necessary, for God’s essence is to exist, God’s ideality is always also reality—thus far Schelling follows Anselm. But logical necessity is not real necessity; all that Anselm proves is that if God exists, he exists necessarily, not contingently. For the later Schelling, there is no transition from the conceptual necessity of the identity of the ideal and the real in God to the objective existence of the absolute; if the latter is to be known, it can only be known *a posteriori*, that is, it can only be known to the degree that it reveals itself.

The early Schelling had identified consciousness as the *telos* of natural history; the middle Schelling significantly qualifies this position: The emergence of consciousness out of nature is not a natural evolution or a necessary movement of the lower to the higher, but is rather an unfathomable act of a free God, who seeks to become conscious of himself through the creation of his other.<sup>9</sup> As expressed in the Freedom Essay, God lets the ground loose, allows it to try to satisfy its selfish, chaotic, and impossible desire, to exist in itself, so that the ‘simultaneity’ of the potencies will be disrupted and something other than God come to exist.<sup>10</sup> The contraction does not disrupt the eternal simultaneity of the principles in God,

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<sup>8</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars*, in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F.W.J. Schelling*, trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1944), 200; SW, I/7: 424; translation mine.

<sup>9</sup> Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars*, 203; SW, I/7: 428; translation mine.

<sup>10</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 70; SW, I/7: 408.

Schelling is careful to point out, for the eternal balance of potencies must remain as that against which the now really existent (first) potency contrasts. Because eternal being can only be revealed in its opposite, God allows his opposite to be; he creates finite being, matter, history, so that he might be revealed in it. The contraction of first potency is the beginning of time: What pre-exists simultaneously in the absolute now unfolds dramatically in the three ages of the world, the past, the present, and the future.

Consciousness is no longer expansion and appropriation of being, but rather the product of a contraction and self-emptying of being. What God does in creating the world—empties himself or lowers himself for the sake of becoming conscious—'[c]reation is above all a lowering of God'<sup>11</sup>—reason does in recognizing the real. Like the second person of the Trinity, who is only truly himself to the degree that he empties himself, renounces the possibility of being for himself, renounces his own claim to divinity over and against the divinity of the Father, so is reason in the late Schelling only truly itself when it empties itself, renounces its own interior world as sufficient to itself and takes on the form of its opposite, one that possesses nothing but depends entirely on an outside. Just as it is crucial to a proper understanding of the Christological hymn in the second chapter of Paul's Letter to the Philippians to recognize that Christ *has indeed a claim to equality with God*, that Christ could have set himself up as God in the place of the Father, but 'did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped but, emptied himself, taking the form a bond-servant' (Philippians 2:6–7 NASB), that is, just as it is crucial to understand Christ as renouncing a *real possibility for self-divinization* and freely assuming the form of the anti-divine, so is it crucial for Schelling's transcendental empiricism or move into realism to recognize that absolute idealism is not simply a mistake; it is a genuinely plausible reversal of the truth. Schelling in effect admits that absolute idealism can stand (logically) as pseudo-metaphysics, an ersatz philosophy of being. Reason can set up such an idol because it is not, as in vulgar empiricism, a *tabula rasa*, but contains an *a priori* idea of being, with its three modalities, the triadic ontology of being. Absolute idealism takes the 'movement' of the three potencies to be something more than what it is, something more

<sup>11</sup> Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars*, 204; SW, I/7: 429; translation mine.

than a potentization or intensification of a concept merely immanent to reason, and thus *mistakes* the transition of A1 to A2 to A3, which is no doubt *conceptually* a transition from infinite possibility to infinite actuality, as a movement from essence to existence, a self-actualization of the notion. The play of the potencies is a logical intensification of the *a priori* notion of being or A, which is wholly immanent to subjectivity or transcendental in Kant's sense of the term. Hegel and perhaps even in his own way the young Schelling (the Schelling of the *Identitätsphilosophie*) mistake the potentization of being to be a transition from essence to existence. The error is the trap of the ontological argument, the assumption that one can move from a concept of being to the existence of being on the basis of the content of the concept alone.

It is important to note that Schelling does not just reject the ontological argument *tout court* (while Hegel's whole system can be described as its elaboration); he does not say with Aquinas, that we have no concept of God such as Anselm assumes; rather, Schelling grants the proponents of the ontological argument their starting point, namely an *a priori* concept of infinitely actual being, and thereby accounts for the mistake they make, which is, in effect, to deny the externality of the really real. The proponents of the ontological argument, like Narcissus, are bewitched by their own reflection: Reason gazes at itself and takes what it sees to be the whole of the real.<sup>12</sup> But it can only be so bewitched because it has something of its own: It contains an *a priori* concept that is nothing less than an anticipation of the infinite itself.

The three potencies—indeterminacy (*das Seinkönnende*, or *das Sein*), determinacy (*das Seinemüssende*, or *das reine Seiende*), and self-determination (*das Seinsollende*)—are the triadic *a priori*, the basic schema of human understanding, which is in ordinary cognition applied to the real. The three potencies are the true determinations of what in Hegel is misconceived as the three moments of the self-actualizing notion. Schelling explains not only the true alternative to the Hegelian triad but also how it is possible, even wholly logical, that the Hegelian error came about in the following way:

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<sup>12</sup> In this regard Schelling agrees with Jacobi's earlier critique of Kantian idealism and rationalism. The proximity of the late Schelling to Jacobi must neither be underestimated nor exaggerated. Schelling agrees with Jacobi's critique of rationalism as narcissistic but disagrees that the only alternative is a religion based on faith alone.

Thus arose those wrongful and improper expressions of a *self-movement* of the idea, words through which the idea was personified and ascribed an existence that it did not and could not have. [...] Yet precisely this advance from relative nonbeing to being, to that which according to its nature or *concept* is being, was viewed as a successive realization of the concept of being, as the successive self-actualization of the idea. This advance, however, was in fact merely a successive elevation or intensification of the concept, which in its highest potency remained just a concept, without there ever being provided a transition to *real* being [*wirklichen Daseyn*], to existence.<sup>13</sup>

A question hovers over the account of the ecstasy of reason as it is given in the Berlin Lectures, a question that cuts into the heart of the problem of the hermeneutical circularity existing between negative and positive philosophy: given its seductive illusion of self-sufficiency, of transcendental absoluteness, how does reason, the negative philosophy, discover its finitude and contingency? How does reason discover that its triadic notion of being is merely negative, merely conceptual, and must somehow negate itself in a quasi *via negativa*, that is, renounce its claim to adequacy, or what amounts to the same thing, look to an outside for the really existing being? Is this transition a *logical process*, a process immanent to reason? Or do we need to *start* outside, in existence, with the *real* possibility of an outside to reason, thus the real possibility of the reasonless? On the first account, the transition from negative to positive philosophy begins in logic, even if it ends in the real. On the second account, it begins in what we could call ethics, in existence, not essence, and so can reach for the real because it starts with a non-thematized experience of it. If the first is correct, Schelling is much closer to Hegel than we might otherwise think. If the second is correct, he is closer to Kierkegaard than is commonly assumed. The ambiguity in Schelling's account of the transition of negative to positive philosophy explains how he could come to be interpreted in both ways: thus, he could be the completion of German Idealism, as

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<sup>13</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Grounding of the Positive Philosophy* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *GPP*], trans. Bruce Matthews (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), 139; *SW*, II/3: 73.

Schulz would have it,<sup>14</sup> or its overcoming as Fuhrmans,<sup>15</sup> Frank,<sup>16</sup> Bowie,<sup>17</sup> Tritten,<sup>18</sup> and many others have argued.

The account of the transition from the negative philosophy to the positive philosophy at the end of lecture four of the *Grounding of the Positive Philosophy* describes, on the surface, a movement from essence to existence that appears to be immanent to reason. But this would mean that the ecstasy of reason begins in logic, and negative philosophy is the necessary propaedeutic to positive philosophy—something that elsewhere we are told is not the case (*GPP*, 148; *SW*, II/3: 84–85). The inside/outside dialectic that was the very origin of German Idealism is now resolved in a new way. Where the first German Idealists, the young Schelling included, rejected the Kantian notion of an outside to reason, the thing-in-itself, insofar as such an outside could never be deduced transcendently, Schelling now sides with Kant in his argument against idealism in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. There Kant argues that an experience of an outside is the very condition of the possibility of experiencing an inside. Kant's argument is that time as a measure of inner experience is only possible if inner experience itself is profiled against an outside, a world of things irreducible to my inner experience of them. Schelling wishes to demarcate the inner from the outer otherwise than Kant does: the inner is thought, logic, and concept, and the outer is deed, history, and event. But the point is similar. Just as Kant can call time the form of all *inner* intuition because he experiences the inner profiled against the outer, so can Schelling call philosophy negative because it is profiled against the positive. The conceptual world is experienced as a conceptual world only insofar as it is profiled against a non-conceptual world.

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<sup>14</sup>Walter Schulz, *Die Vollendung des Deutschen Idealismus in der Spätphilosophie Schellings*, second expanded edition (Stuttgart: Pfullingen, 1975).

<sup>15</sup>Horst Fuhrmans, *Schellings letzte Philosophie: Die negative und positive Philosophie im Einsatz des Spätidealismus* (Berlin: Junker und Dünhaupt, 1940).

<sup>16</sup>Manfred Frank, *Der unendliche Mangel an Sein: Schellings Hegelkritik und die Anfänge der Marxschen Dialektik*, second expanded and revised edition (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1992).

<sup>17</sup>Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>18</sup>Tyler Tritten, *Beyond Presence: The Late F.W.J. Schelling's Criticism of Metaphysics* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012).

## 5 The Inverted Idea

The late Schelling's positive philosophy is constructed on the basis of three conceptually related figures: kenosis, ecstasy, and inversion. All three are variations on one theme, which Schelling draws from the Christological hymn in Paul's letter to the Philippians (2: 6–7), the notion of a being that *could* in fact remain in itself, that has a certain content that could allow it to turn inward and absorb itself in itself—the narcissism of reason, which is possible only because reason is not nothing, not a *tabula rasa*, but possesses an *a priori* concept of being as its own immediate content—but which *decides* not to and empties itself (kenosis), sets itself outside itself (ecstasy), and turns itself inside out (inversion), gesturing with its whole emptied, ecstatic, and inverted being to a being that is not of its own making. On the one hand, the notion is entirely Biblical: It is the idea of a creature that could make itself into its own God because it is made in the image of its Creator and so possesses freedom, but chooses not to, and renounces its pseudo self-sufficiency, wills the truth about itself and its absolute dependence on an outside. The Christ does what Adam did not: Rather than make himself into the alternative God and deny the Father, he empties himself and takes on the form of a slave, turning his whole being inside out as it were and becoming in his very existence a tribute to the Father.

Schelling does not elaborate this notion in Biblical language, at least not at first. He elaborates it as the solution to the problem of modern philosophy, which is the problem of the narcissism of reason, and a reversal of Descartes' argument for the existence of God (Meditation Five). The argument is compressed into the following passage:

That which just is [*das bloß Seyende*] is being [*das Seyn*] from which properly speaking, every idea, that is, every potency is excluded. We will, thus, only be able to call it the inverted idea [*Umgekehrte Idee*], the idea in which reason is set *outside* itself. Reason can posit being in which there is still nothing of a concept, of a whatness, only as something that is absolutely *outside itself* (of course only in order to acquire it thereafter, a posteriori, as its content, and in this way to return to itself as the same time). In this posting, reason is therefore set outside itself, absolutely ecstatic. (*GPP*, 203; *SW*, II/3: 162–163)



Descartes doubts everything outside his own thinking and endeavors to proceed from within thought itself to the establishment of an outside; in that way, he performs the narcissism of reason, the refusal of exteriority. He discovers within reason a rich world of possibilities, innate ideas, which he assumes he has produced himself. The ontological argument is then used to build a bridge between the idea of the infinite to the exterior and bring about the transition from essence to existence on the level of essence, the move from the negative to the positive without ever leaving the negative. We will not discuss here Levinas' important observation that already in Meditation Three Descartes discovers that his epoché is an impossibility because the idea of the infinite present within his thinking is already an indication that he did not produce himself but depends upon an exterior. We will stay for the moment with Descartes as the father of idealism, the one who proves that reason is sovereign over itself and apparently contains within itself all that it needs, the whole world of ideas as its own immediate content.

What Schelling demonstrates is Descartes' overlooking of being, the forgetting of the *sum* in his argument *cogito ergo sum*. Thinking may be given and self-productive in the *cogito*, but *the being* of the thinking—this is not produced by thinking, but is rather the presupposition of thought, or, as Schelling puts it, is not because there is thinking that there is being, but on the contrary, only because there is being is there thinking. Thus, positive philosophy does not begin in idea, essence, whatness, and possibility, as does Descartes, but in facticity, existence, thatness, and reality.

But with what fact does Schelling begin? It is not with the sheer *that* (*das reine Daß*), the necessary being, or sheer existence that he begins, although certainly in a methodological sense the positive philosophy starts there, but rather with the existent that I myself am. Thus, I do not need to climb through the ideal to find the real (which is in any case impossible); I am already in the real insofar as I regard myself not merely as abstract reason, as disembodied thinking, but as a will (*Ursein ist Wollen, nicht Denken*). Now I posit, that is, I intend, that I am what I am, not that upon which all depends, the infinite being, but nothing more than the finite being that I experience myself as, one who wants and wills because he does not possess the fullness of the real. Thus, I posit myself as that which depends on something that is not myself, as the I, which depends on being in order to be able to say 'I am.'

This positing of the willing self is not a logical movement but a decision, that is, it is not a process that occurs logically in thinking but an act of willing. I could in fact posit myself otherwise. By abstracting from my existence, I could posit myself as reason itself, as pure possibility, for I am also a reasoning being, not merely a willing being, and insofar as I am a reasoning being, I possess the image of being as my own content. If I did so, that is, if I followed Descartes and modern idealism, then I would be working simply in negative philosophy, but not in negative philosophy that knows itself as such, rather in a negative philosophy that disavows its own negativity, chooses not to know that reason is always the reasoning of a finite willing existent, and so can consistently take reason to be identical to the real. To know negative philosophy as negative is only possible for one who has already posited the positive; thus, while negative philosophy has a logical priority to positive philosophy, positive philosophy has an existential priority to negative philosophy. Since it would still be I, the really existent finite being that I am, that would, with Descartes, posit itself as reason as such, the negative philosophy's disavowal of its own negativity can only be an *epoché* of the real—which it is in Descartes—a suspension of the spontaneous and everyday judgment that things *are* and that they exist outside myself.

Since I now posit myself as real, which means since I *will* and know myself in my willing, I am already in the real. 'Pure thought, in which everything develops of necessity, knows nothing of a decision, of an act, or even of a deed' (*GPP*, 211; *SW*, II/3: 173). But how do I posit myself as finite, that is, how do I posit myself without at the same time absolutizing myself, without intending myself as the absolute? How do I empty myself and thus stay in the act of willing *on the outside*, resist the siren call of reason to enfold itself in itself and become absorbed in its own inner world? I do this not by positing myself as such, that is, not by asserting myself, willing myself, and insisting *I am*, but rather by willing another and thereby negating myself, saying, 'It alone is, I am as though I were nothing.'

To get to this moment of *kenosis* Schelling introduces an intermediate step, no less ecstatic than the recognition of the truly existing God, but not yet asserting the latter as such. There must be a purely philosophical transition from the narcissism of reason to the ecstatic recognition of being. I do not posit myself directly, but only indirectly, performatively, by deciding,

acting, and judging, not that *I am*, but that *that being*, which is not me, and upon which I depend, truly *is* and cannot not be. I posit not the I but the sheer reality of being upon which the I depends for its existence, the being that has no priority in concept: unprethinkable being (*das unvordenkliche Sein*). I posit this purely negatively at first, as that which I am not, insofar as I can conceive myself and so have an *a priori* notion of myself, but that which has no apriority in thinking, which is the *prius* absolutely, and in that sense the groundless being, and which I presuppose in any assertion of my own being. Notice, it is not an *experience* of being that starts the positive philosophy: I do not *experience* sheer existence, the pure *that*; rather, I *posit* it. If it were an experience, sheer existence would be in part conceived, since nothing can be experienced without some degree of conceptualization. And if it is in part conceived, then the being that is so conceived is not the unprethinkable being, the being that is wholly outside of reason, but rather a being that has an *a priori* concept adequate to it in reason. The pure *that* is in a way the *intentum* of an *intentio*, but a very peculiar intention, one that renounces *a priori* possession of its *intentum*, thus the intention of the non-conceptual, and to that degree, an inverse intention (the inversion of intentionality). Reason in this act empties itself and gestures to that which it does not and cannot contain in itself, that is, it gestures to the factual condition of its own possibility. In the ecstasy of reason, thinking thinks itself as product, not producer, by endeavoring to think that which cannot be thought and thus renouncing its claim to totality. Reason experiences itself as inadequate to the real, which is to say, reason experiences itself *as real*, that is, as existing by means of an act that is not its own.

In the light of the foregoing, admittedly 'existential' reading of the transition from negative to positive philosophy, the late Schelling's scattered remarks about Hegel come together. Hegel includes the positive within the negative and so never knows the negative as such, while Schelling never presumed that identity-philosophy was exhaustive of the real (*GPP*, 149; *SW*, II/3: 86). Even if the young Schelling failed to explicitly acknowledge the positive, Hegel went much further and claimed to have included history and particularity in the purely rational philosophy (*GPP*, 149; *SW*, II/3: 86–86). Hegel fails to acknowledge how nature interrupts logic (*GPP*, 150; *SW*, II/3: 88). In short, Hegel is an immanentist and denies the possibility of a real outside to reason.

## 6 Conclusion

It is still questionable whether Schelling had Hegel right, if, in fact, Hegel is nothing other than the compounding of instrumental and anthropocentric rationalism. Yet the objection to Hegel as he understood him allowed the late Schelling to give a certain definition to his path of thinking, a definition that had eluded him in his earlier work. The critique helps us recognize Schellingianism in its various forms. The intuition of a hidden ground of mind and matter, the displacement of merely human rationality in the face of something far more sublime, which reveals itself as much in the non-human as in the human, and above all, the sacred otherness of the person, who is never known on the order of essence, concept, and ideality, who indeed is never really known at all, but who is recognized in their acts—these are the pillars of Schelling's thought and recur in various forms among Schellingian thinkers. Since the absolute wholly transcends reason for Schelling, there is no place for a Hegelian apotheosis of 'the notion': Merely human rationality always remains infinitely wide of the mark when it comes to absolute truth. After living through the age of idealism—indeed, in many ways, founding it—Schelling came to the realization that a philosophy that holds itself accountable to concepts alone is a lifeless and empty fiction. But Schelling does not draw from this critique of philosophy either the obscurantist or the cynical conclusion that philosophy itself can accomplish little. Instead, the critique leads him to develop a framework in which thought can nonetheless be open to that which constitutively transcends it and can even discuss it in a scientific way. Indeed, Schelling demands that we do so. In thus refusing to place restrictions on what can be, but instead giving itself over kenotically to what appears, no matter how strange what appears may be, Schelling's philosophical humility, far from emasculating reason, empowers it to genuinely and productively think the real.

# 12

## And Hence Everything Is Dionysus: Schelling and the Cabiri in Berlin

Jason M. Wirth

### 1 Introduction

When Schelling made his much-anticipated ascent to Berlin in 1841, he confounded expectations by turning to positive philosophy, most pointedly in the form of what he called the ‘philosophy of mythology and revelation.’ This essay seeks to discern what is at stake in positive philosophy, both as such and in relationship to mythology and revelation. What powers of thinking does the turn to the ‘positive’ expose in philosophy?

Schelling did not come to Berlin with a new philosophy or a new set of arguments to add to philosophy’s standing arsenal. He came to do nothing less than revolutionize our very sense of the powers of philosophy and, by consequence, consciousness itself. In the wake of Hegel, Schelling endeavored to do this by embodying a more experimental philosophy, a radical empiricism if you will, that nonetheless had drunk from the *fact*, however occluded, of the gods and of a more sacred mode of inhabiting the earth. Schelling called this new mode of ‘positive philosophy’

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philosophical religion. It had nothing to do with a reactionary return to traditional modes of religiosity, as has been often assumed in the history of philosophy. It was too late for that. Rather Schelling, despite the great secular and technological din that was to be heard around him, attempted to discern a religion that is inseparable from the empirical and still in advent, that is, a religion that points to the fecundity and inexhaustible earth of existence through which a new Christianity to come gleams.

In discussing these Berlin lectures, special attention is paid to their roots in Schelling's remarkable 1815 Munich address, 'On the Deities of Samothrace,' as well as to the emerging figure of Dionysus as it develops from the early *The Ages of the World* drafts to the Berlin lectures. Although Schelling's thinking may seem even more remote from us than ever given the religious fractiousness and disillusionment that characterizes our own times, in light of which Schelling's turn to philosophical religion is bound to appear suspicious, I argue that never has it been so timely. It summons us to revive a concern for the earth and more importantly shows us how religion can play a role in the fostering of such concern.

## 2 Remembering the Still to Come

Brot ist der Erde Frucht, doch ists vom Lichte gesegnet,  
 Und vom donnernden Gott kommt die Freude des Weins.  
 —Friedrich Hölderlin, *Brot und Wein* (strophe 8)

In these beautiful lines by Hölderlin, bread and wine, the highest symbols of Christian revelation, are associated with more ancient and less otherworldly gods, indeed with the earth and the sun and the flashing forth of the heavens themselves. Moreover, Hölderlin links 'poets in a destitute age [*Dichter in dürftiger Zeit*]' to the 'holy priests of the wine god,' 'which roamed from land to land in holy night [*welche von Lande zu Land zogen in heiliger Nacht*]' (strophe 7). Drinking such wine and feasting on such bread against an oblivion in which the force of such things can no longer be remembered, in our 'holy drunkenness' with a full wine glass, we remain 'wakeful at night [*wachend ... bei Nacht*]' with our 'holy memory [*heilig Gedächtniß*]' (strophe 2). Hölderlin strikingly conflates the game

change that is announced with the coming of the Christ—bread and wine as the new testament and the beginning of a new world—with something that precedes incarnation, even though it comes in the form of a mystery religion (*Geheimlehre*). Dionysus did not manifest publicly, in the terms of public disclosure, but rather demanded a more radical ἀνάμνησις<sup>1</sup> of the potencies of being itself. Furthermore, although Jesus gave rise to the many public forms of Christianity, the Messianic remains no less obscure and calls for an equally radical *Andenken* and ἀνάμνησις. Feasting on the bread of the earth and drunk on the wine suddenly revealed from the heavens, we abide in watchful awakening during the night.

This is also precisely how Schelling understood the problem of all philosophical thinking: *Everything comes down to who we are in relationship to the bread of the earth and the wine of the heavens*. How does thinking negotiate the feast and holy inebriation of thinking? In his much anticipated inaugural lectures 1841, as eager audiences in Berlin awaited the dispensation of yet another new philosophy, Schelling, to the surprise and often consternation of many, took positive philosophy into this bewildering realm of the gods whose coming we drunkenly but vigilantly remember. ‘Where there is no madness that is governed and brought under rule, there is also no powerful understanding [Wo kein Wahnsinn ist, der geregelt und beherrscht wird, da ist auch kein mächtiger Verstand].’<sup>2</sup> Stupidity or *Blödsinn*, consequently, does not ‘consist’ of a lack of intelligence—the intelligent are even more dramatically inclined to stupidity than are the dim-witted—but rather of the ‘absence of this originary

<sup>1</sup> From F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World* [1815, hereinafter cited parenthetically as *AW3*], trans. Jason M. Wirth (New York: SUNY Press, 2000), xxxvii; *SW*, I/8: 201: ‘What we call knowledge is only the striving towards ἀνάμνησις [*Wiederbewußtwerden*] and hence more of a striving toward knowledge than knowledge itself. For this reason, the name Philosophy had been bestowed upon it incontrovertibly by that great man of antiquity.’ Citations of Schelling provide the pagination of the English translation if one exists, although all the present translations are my own, followed by that of the *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, vols 1–14, ed. Karl Friedrich August Schelling (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J. G. Cotta, 1856–61), unless a text was not published as part of it. References to the K.F.A. Schelling edition are given by the abbreviation *SW*, division, volume and page number.

<sup>2</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung: 1841/42* [this is the so-called Paulus *Nachschrift* or transcript, which will be hereinafter cited parenthetically as *PN*], second, expanded edition, ed. Manfred Frank (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 97.

matter [*Abwesenheit dieses ursprünglichen Stoffes*],’ the lack of ‘*the madness*, the *potentia* that lies concealed in the depths of the human *Wesen* [der Wahninn, *der potentia in der Tiefe des menschlichen Wesens verborgen liegt*]’ (PN, 186). In the *Urfassung* of the *Philosophie der Offenbarung*,<sup>3</sup> Schelling had already linked this to both art and philosophy in a manner that strikingly anticipated the early Nietzsche: ‘The mystery of true art is to be *simultaneously* mad and levelheaded [*wahnsinnig und besonnen*], not in distinctive moments, but rather *uno eodemque actu* [altogether in a single act]. This is what distinguishes the Apollonian inspiration from the Dionysian’ (U, 422).

This was, however, a distinction that Schelling had first announced in *Die Weltalter*:

But where there is no madness, there is also certainly no proper, active, living intellect (and consequently there is just the dead intellect, dead intellectuals). For in what does the intellect prove itself than in the coping with and governance and regulation of madness? Hence the utter lack of madness leads to another extreme, to imbecility (idiocy), which is an absolute lack of all madness. But there are two other kinds of persons in which there really is madness. There is one kind of person that governs madness and precisely in this overwhelming shows the highest force of the intellect. The other kind of person is governed by madness and is someone who really is mad. (AW3, 103; SW, I/8: 338–339)

In 1815, Schelling, *simultaneously* mad and levelheaded, published his last work of lasting significance, a *Beilage* to the unpublished and never completed *Weltalter* called *Über die Gottheiten von Samothrake*. With the exception of thinkers like Coleridge and Creuzer, the address had little positive impact. Its intense and extremely sober philological detail, which exceeds the length of the address itself, is accompanied by a radical genealogical unpacking of the repressed potencies of religiosity as such. This was no science of mythology with its taxonomies and compilations of data, but rather the excavation of a radical revolution, or conversion, of consciousness itself as Schelling endeavored, as he would

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<sup>3</sup> *Urfassung Philosophie der Offenbarung* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as U], 2 vols, ed. Walter E. Ehrhardt (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1992), 708.



claim in Berlin in 1842, to 'expand' both '*philosophy and the philosophical consciousness itself*'.<sup>4</sup>

When Schelling ascended to Berlin in 1841, the conditions for receiving this kind of work had only grown dimmer. What was already true in 1815 was even truer in 1841, prompting Walter Otto to remark that 'μῦθος remained in an age in which poesy was lost.'<sup>5</sup> For Schelling, art emerged from the same groundless ground from which the mythic more originally issued, but now the ruin of the gods and the rise of the night of worldwide *Blödsinn* had reduced the gods to dead positivistic objects, toothless data, neutralized objects stored in our catalogs and histories. The λόγος had been demoted to task of deflating the mythic into a science of mythology, a science that bore as little upon the tautegory of the gods (the coming of the gods as themselves) as did positivistic natural science upon the earth. Just as Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* tirelessly combatted the humiliation of the earth, Schelling's philosophy of mythology, especially his 1842 *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, battled the *Blödsinn* of scientific mythology.

Dogmatic theology and its reactionary hold no doubt contributed to the deafness and disinterest that greeted Schelling's project (think of the relentless Dr. Paulus), but so did the unfolding death of God and the rise of the *Blödsinn* of positivism that Nietzsche would also soon diagnose. 'A fable has originated in France that has also found followers in Germany: that something new should take the place of Christianity [*Eine Sage ging von Frankreich aus und hat auch in Deutschland Anhang gefunden, daß etwas Neues an die Stelle des Christentums treten müsse*]' (PN, 97). Indeed, Nietzsche would later exclaim, 'Almost two thousand years and not a single new god!' All we have is the 'pitiable god of Christian monotonotheism [*erbarmungswürdiger Gott des christlichen Monotono-Theismus*]' (§19).<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche was done with Christianity, but Schelling undertook the other possibility: We have never even begun with Christianity.

<sup>4</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, trans. Mason Richey and Markus Zisselsberger (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 175; SW, II/1: 252.

<sup>5</sup> Walter F. Otto, 'Der Durchbruch zum antiken Mythos im XIX. Jahrhundert,' *Die Gestalt und das Sein* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1955), 221.

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, in *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, division 6, vol. 3, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969), 183.

In both cases, the status quo of Christianity has come into crisis and its end was nigh.

Schelling, whose Berlin lectures would generally go unappreciated—Kierkegaard, for example, thought he went on and on—was unperturbed. He asked: ‘Have you even understood Christianity? How so, if a philosophy would have to first unlock its depths? [*Habt ihr das Christentum den schon erkannt? Wie, wenn eine Philosophie erst seine Tiefen aufschlüsse*]’ (PN, 97). Despite the long history of Christian metaphysics, philosophy had not yet unearthed the latent promise of Christianity. Contrary to the tradition of Christian philosophy, Schelling was not using philosophy to offer yet another apology for institutional Christianity. The secret depths of Revelation had not been revealed in the public event of Revelation, depths that heretofore relegated Revelation to a kind of mystery religion (*Geheimlehre*). Religion, left to its own devices, lacked full access to itself, and the key to opening its concealed depths, philosophical religion, depended on the event of positive philosophy. The latter is ‘*toto coelo verschieden*,’ diametrically or by the whole extent of the heavens opposed, to Christian philosophy and even offers for the first time the ‘true concept of religion’ (PN, 148) as such. Until now, we have not even fully appreciated what it might even mean to consider oneself religious. Religion has been sealed, awaiting philosophy to unleash its power. This was not a Christianity that we have had, but rather a Christianity to come, a prophetic Christianity made possible by a new kind of philosophical thinking. Schelling was a kind of second John the Baptist, with a premonition (*Ahnung*) of another kind of future, a future rooted in the ongoing κένωσις<sup>7</sup> of a living God, ‘*who comes out of itself through its own power and becomes other to itself in its unprethinkable being* [der aus eigener Macht aus sich herausgeht, ein Anderes von sich in seinem unvordenklichen Sein wird]’ (PN, 170). Reason is beholden to the ongoing revelation of being such that being always remains unthought in its coming to be thought. Reason must navigate the non-reason of the ground and

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<sup>7</sup>‘[R]ather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness [ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβὼν, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος]’ (Philippians 2:7, NIV).

the unprethinkability (*Unvordenklichkeit*) of existence. Being is what is always still to be thought in whatever has been thought.

That being said, Schelling did not turn to the future by looking directly to the future to imagine what otherwise might be. Instead, he looked to the future by turning to the concealed depths of the past. What is still yet to be is already intimated in what is deeply buried and repressed in the past. The rudiments of this problem were already at the heart of the *Weltalter* project, and the initial exercise in such an excavation was already undertaken in the 1815 *Samothrace* address:

What if in Greek lore concerning the gods (to say nothing of Indian and other Near-Eastern teachings) the ruins of an insight jut forth, indeed, the debris of a scientific system in the most ancient written documents known to us that far exceeds the scope of Revelation? What if in general Revelation not only opened up a new stream of insights but also closed off what flowed earlier on in a more narrowly circumscribed but precisely for that reason more secure and sustaining riverbed? What if such lore, even after it had been corrupted and had degenerated irremediably into idolatry, lore exhibiting the most sagaciously drawn limits and touching on merely one part of that primal system, could yet be said to preserve precisely those traits that might lead us once again into the magnificent encompassing whole of the system? (*SW*, I/8: 362–363)<sup>8</sup>

This is a striking, perhaps unprecedented claim. Among the *Trümmer einer Erkenntniß*, that is, the ruins of a mode of knowing and the debris of a subsequently unintelligible and degenerate mythology, lies a forgotten insight into the problem of Revelation that allows Revelation itself—which proclaimed itself as something brand new that as such ended the

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Wie aber, wenn [...] sich schon in griechischer Götterlehre (von indischer und anderer morgenländischer nicht zu reden) Trümmer einer Erkenntniß, ja eines wissenschaftlichen Systems zeigten, das weit über den Umkreis hinausginge, den die älteste durch schriftliche Denkmäler bekannte Offenbarung gezogen hat? Wenn überhaupt diese nicht sowohl einen neuen Strom von Erkenntniß eröffnet hätte, als den durch eine frühere schon eröffneten nur in ein engeres, aber eben darum sicherer fortleitendes Beet eingeschlossen? Wenn sie, nach einmal eingetretener Verderbniß unaufhaltsamer Entartung in Vielgötterei, mit weisester Einschränkung, von jenem Ursystem nur einen Teil, aber doch diejenigen Züge erhalten hätte, die wieder ins große und umfassende Ganze leiten können?’ This is from a forthcoming translation of the *Samothrace* address by David F. Krell and myself. All citations from the *Samothrace* address refer to this translation.

reign of the mythological gods—to at last more fully reveal itself. The riverbed of revelation was revealed before Revelation as such publically revealed itself, and the path to the latter goes through the ruins of the former. ‘For the doctrine of the Cabiri serves as the key, so to speak, to all other systems, by virtue of its antiquity as well as its clarity and simplicity of outline’ (SW, I/8: 423, *Nachschrift*).

Schelling’s strategy does for what is concealed and degenerated in the *Trümmer einer Erkenntniß* what Alasdair MacIntyre argued he was doing for ethical discourse in *After Virtue*. Lkening the ruins of contemporary ethical discourse to an intellectual experiment in which we imagine a future in which fragments of scientific discourse survive, but the general sense of what is at stake in science as a whole is lost, MacIntyre argued that although we use ethical utterances all the time, we have no idea what we are doing and have ‘no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture.’<sup>9</sup> We speak in inherited ethical fragments, but have no governing idea of what ethics as such is. In the same fashion, mythology collapsed into unintelligibility even as the gods and rites persisted. Polytheism, for example, has something haphazard about it, as if there just a bunch of gods roaming the earth and the heavens and that the main point was to know who and what each god was. Merely to know *what* each god is avoids the more difficult philosophical and religion problem, namely, *that* there are gods.

Concealed within these *Trümmer einer Erkenntniß* and, as such, no longer intelligible in the terms of the self-understanding that characterizes what remains of that ruined *Erkenntniß*, lurks a more comprehensive revelation of the original potencies of the divine (the ‘*that* there are gods’). Hence, Schelling does not take any of the extant public accounts of the gods at face value, but rather subjects them to a thoroughgoing genealogical critique as he seeks to discern what remains otherwise hidden, ‘the covert magic [*geheimer Zauber*] of those deeper connections’ that come to the fore even in ancient times within the esoteric realm ‘of the mystery doctrines [*Geheimlehren*’ (SW, I/8: 363).

The Cabiri, the initiates into the rites of Samothrace, experienced ‘inalienable life itself as it advances in a series of enhancements from the

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<sup>9</sup>Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, second edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 6.

deepest to the highest levels, and that it presented the universal magic and the theurgy that endure forever in the cosmos, whereby the invisible—which is in effect the transcendently actual—is ceaselessly brought to revelation and actuality' (SW, I/8: 368).<sup>10</sup> The Cabiri, Schelling confesses, would never have articulated the esoteric revelation at the heart of their mystery religion in quite this way, but nonetheless 'the doctrine proper was directed toward life and toward a disposition [*Gesinnung*] on how life should be lived' (SW, I/8: 368). The mystery transformed one's very disposition or *Gesinnung* to life.

The Cabiri initiates, however, even when depicted as among the gods in the cosmos, were not *Naturphilosophen*. The latter implies a context (the rise of positivistic science and the need for the kind philosophical critique that occupied Schelling in the early years of his so called negative philosophy) that would have been unthinkable and unimaginable to the Cabiri. Their initiation was nonetheless healing and transformative. 'Those who were initiated into the rites were better prepared to live and to die, and happier in both their living and their dying [*Besser und für das leben wie für den Tod fröhlicher wurden nach allgemeiner Überzeugung die dort Eingeweihten*]' (SW, I/8: 348). Even those who were down on their luck, including criminals, could go to Samothrace to receive a second chance, a new beginning and thereby a new lease on life (SW, I/8: 348).<sup>11</sup>

Twenty-six years later, when Schelling came to Berlin amid all of the controversies and conflict that comprised the Hegelian legacy, he did not announce a new line of attack and a new, counter-Hegelian position. (Such a strategy would end up, of course, only vindicating Hegelian dialectical thinking.) He came rather to give philosophy a new lease on life. Yes, he does accuse Hegel of confusedly making the dialectic, a purely negative movement of thought, into a positive philosophy, but he did

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<sup>10</sup> 'Darstellung des unauf löslichen Lebens selbst, wie es in einer Folge von Steigerungen vom Tiefsten ins Höchste fortschreitet, Darstellung der allgemeinen Magie und der im ganzen Weltall immer dauernden Theurgie, durch welche das Unsichtbare ja Ueberwirkliche unablässig zur Offenbarung und Wirklichkeit gebracht wird.'

<sup>11</sup> One sees this practice preserved in other parts of the world, including the sacred refuge sites of the Hawaiians. If the condemned (those who violated a *kapu* or taboo) or those defeated in war could make it to a sacred refuge, for example, Pu'uhonua o Honaunau, now preserved as a National Historic Park on the Big Island of Hawaii, they could receive a new lease on life. Otherwise the sentence was death.

not conclude that there was no place for negative philosophy, including his own earlier *Naturphilosophie*. Negative philosophy is not wrong, but it cannot account for the self-presentation of being, that is, existence. Schelling nonetheless did not come to Berlin to wage war. 'I do not want to lash the wounds but rather heal the wounds [...] I am not here to destroy, but rather to build, to found a castle in which philosophy can dwell securely from now on' (PN, 95).<sup>12</sup> Schelling is clear that he is not replacing his earlier philosophy with a newer philosophy, or peddling a new system, but rather presenting 'a new science that heretofore had been regarded as impossible [*eine neue, bis jetzt für unmöglich gehaltene Wissenschaft*]' (PN, 95) and to secure its mysterious ground. This nothing less than the healing of German thought by way of healing the wound within *Wissenschaft* as such. In other words, it was to excavate a healing insight from the *Trümmer einer Erkenntniß*. The prophet of the Cabiri had come to Berlin!

### 3 The Positivity of Revelation

What is this mysterious, recalcitrant, and heretofore concealed ground that Schelling sought to secure and, so to speak, *reveal*? Had not reason endlessly spun on its own wheels, trying to orient itself to its own proper activity? Although Schelling was not abandoning reason, he had come to announce that the ground of reason is not itself reasonable, even if it is 'the innate content of reason [*der eingeborne Inhalt der Vernunft*]' (PN, 100). It is rather that which continuously offered itself to reason and, so to speak, reveals itself in a manner that can never be specified in advance, thereby revealing reason to be ecstatic and dependent on a ground of which it cannot take possession. '*Revelation must contain something transcending reason*, yet something that one cannot have without reason' (PN, 98).<sup>13</sup> As was already announced in the *Freiheitsschrift*, this is

<sup>12</sup> 'Ich will nicht Wunden schlagen, sondern die Wunden heilen [...] Nicht zu zerstören bin ich da, sondern zu bauen, eine Burg zu gründen, in der die Philosophie von nun an sicher wohnen soll.'

<sup>13</sup> 'Die Offenbarung muß etwas über die Vernunft hinausgehendes enthalten, *etwas aber, das man ohne die Vernunft noch nicht hat.*'

the problem of the relationship of ground (*Urgrund, Abgrund, Ungrund*) to existence. Reason, left to its own devices, discerns what something is (*das Was, quid sit*), but as such, it cannot entertain the question of existence as such (*das Daß, quod sit*). ‘What takes shape through the movement of the concept in the purely logical concept is not the actual world, but only the world as quiddity’ (PN, 99)!<sup>14</sup>

When reason comes to the ground of some ‘what’ that exists, it comes to ‘what serves as the foundation or *ὑποκείμενον*’ (PN, 104) of that something, but, in such an account, the ground is still conceived logically as something, *ein Was*, and it can be apprehended as ground by being thought in relationship to the existent that it grounds. This is even true if one thinks of it as *prima materia* or *das reine Seinkönnende*. What we have done is reason toward this idea and in a sense we can say that thinking has arrived at ‘*das reine Was [quid] der Gottheit*’ (PN, 109). We have arrived at the omega, but not the alpha, the *Endursache* and not the *bewirkende Ursache* (PN, 109). We come to the idea of God, but not to the actual existence of God outside its concept. As such, in this approach ‘*God [...] is only the end of the world, not its creator!* [Gott sei ... nur Ende, nicht Urheber der Welt]’ (PN, 119). This is the ‘*God who is only end*, who has no future and who cannot say “I will be,” who is only *final cause and not principle*’ (PN, 132).<sup>15</sup> This is the force of negative philosophy (see PN, 119), which cannot yet reason from *das Wesen* but merely toward it, rendering it a regulative ideal, that is, something without any positive content, something that does not posit and that is not the life of that positing. This is the Godhead that exists only in our heads, not in the unfolding evolution of the universe. There is no natality, because nothing has begun outside of thinking itself (PN, 110). This is the Godhead whose only home is reason, indeed, as the ‘most immanent concept of reason’ (PN, 110).

Positive philosophy, ‘this second science [*diese zweite Wissenschaft*],’ therefore proceeds ‘from that which exceeds reason [*von dem, was außer*

<sup>14</sup> ‘Was im rein logischen Begriff durch immanente Begriffsbewegung zu Stande kommt, ist nicht die wirkliche Welt, sondern nur dem quid noch!’

<sup>15</sup> ‘Gott, der nur Ende ist, der keine Zukunft hat und nicht sagen kann: Ich werde sein! der nur Finalursache, nicht Prinzip ist.’

*der Vernunft ist]*' (PN, 110). The first hint of this could already be detected in Schelling's *Auseinandersetzung* with Fichte,<sup>16</sup> although, in freeing the thought of nature from the subject, one still had not yet confronted the problem of existence:

*Fichte fashioned the thought of elevating Kant's critique into a science of knowledge that would no longer borrow anything from experience, but would posit [setzen] everything in a self-determining manner. But right from the start he failed to secure for reason the free stance it should have, since he demanded a being at the beginning, indeed something immediately certain. That*

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<sup>16</sup> See Michael Vater and David W. Wood's fine translation of the Fichte-Schelling letter exchange, *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence (1800–1802)* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), as well as Hegel's defense of Schelling's thinking in this regard in the so-called 1801 *Differenzschrift*, rendered to English in 1988 by H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf as *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977). For the German, see *Schelling—Fichte Briefwechsel. Kommentiert und herausgegeben von Hartmut Traub*, ed. Hartmut Traub (Neuried: Ars Una, 2001), and *Differenz des Fichteschen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie*, in *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 4, ed. Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968–), 1–92. Schelling broke decisively with Fichte along these kinds of issues. In the 1806 quite severe confrontation with Fichte, *Darlegung des wahren Verhältnisses der Naturphilosophie zu der verbesserten Fichteschen Lehre* (see *SW*, I/7: 1–126), Schelling attacked Fichte's inability to think the question of nature outside of the ground of subjectivity and its interests, accusing Fichte of *Schwärmerei*. The *Schwärmer*, following Luther's condemnation of those who, claiming to have seen God, fanatically and uncritically swarmed into sects and schools, know what the ground is, and, in Fichte's case, posit nature outside of the subject, as something that resists the subject, but which should be brought under the subject's control. Schelling went on to excoriate Fichte's thinking as *Bauernstolz* (*SW*, I/7: 47), literally the self-congratulatory pride of a peasant who profits from nature without really grasping it. This lopsided and self-serving cultivation is at the heart of a contemporary nature annihilating *Schwärmerei*. 'If an inflexible effort to force his subjectivity through his subjectivity as something universally valid and to exterminate all nature wherever possible and against it to make non-nature [*Unnatur*] a principle and to make all of the severity of a lopsided education in its dazzling isolation count as scientific truths can be called *Schwärmen*, then who in this whole era swarms in the authentic sense more terribly and loudly than Herr Fichte?' (*SW*, I/7: 47). Nonetheless, Fichte's *Schwärmerei*—the absolute as *die eines jeden Ich*—was close to overcoming itself; a single step was required that would have lifted it out of the reduction of the absolute to an idea. '*Only one more step was required to recognize the essence [Wesen] that is the prior condition of all being [Prius alles Sein]. One had only to leave aside the limitation [of being] to self-positing [Sichselbstsetzens] in order to find the absolute point of evolution [Entwicklung]. Rejecting that limitation, science would have become independent of the subject [Es bedurfte nun nur Eines Schrittes, um das Wesen des Prius alles Seins zu erkennen. Die Beschränkung des Sichselbstsetzens, wie es im Ich erschien, brauchte man nur fallen zu lassen, um den absoluten Entwicklungspunkt zu finden.* Dadurch ward die Wissenschaft vom Subjekte unabhängige]' (PN, 111).



could only be the certainty: *I am*. [His] philosophy turned it into everyone's personal I [*die eines jeden Ich*]. (PN, 111)<sup>17</sup>

Schelling did not think that in lieu of a subjective absolute foundation from which everything else would follow one could substitute an objective foundation. The absolute as ground was always for Schelling something that one could not properly think, subject only to intellectual intuition, and, at best a 'a thinking that does not think [*nicht denkendes Denken*]'.<sup>18</sup> 'The most severe misunderstanding it could encounter was the charge that, on the analogy with other systems, it had a self-warranting principle from which the truth of other parts of the system could be derived' (PN, 115).<sup>19</sup> One never takes the grounding principle of thinking into one's intellectual possession or discerns its nature in a concept.

What is at stake in the problem of the positive, however, is not the transformation of a subjective idealism into an objective idealism, but rather the limits of idealism as such. This is what led, for example, Manfred Frank to separate the Romantics from the idealists.<sup>20</sup> For Frank, there is a clearly discernable *Denkraum* or space of thought (GRP, 16) that makes the Romantics something like proto-speculative realists, eschewing dogmatic thought while denying any positive foundationalist role for the Absolute. The Jena philosophers were in part responding to the Austrian philosopher Karl Leonhard Reinhold, the first chair of critical philosophy at Jena, and his *Elementarphilosophie* (Elementary Philosophy), which attempted to develop Kant more systematically by making the principle of consciousness a first principle as well as to Fichte's critical appropriation of this position in

<sup>17</sup> 'Fichte faßt den Gedanken, Kants Kritik in eine Wissenschaft des Wissens zu erheben, die nichts mehr als aus der Erfahrung aufnehmen, sondern selbstbestimmend Alles setzen sollte. Dabei verfehlte er aber die freie Stelle, welche die Vernunft haben sollte, gleich von vorn herein, da er zum Anfang ein Sein, und zwar ein unmittelbar gewisses, verlangte. Das konnte nur das »Ich bin« sein. Die Philosophie ward die eines jeden Ich.'

<sup>18</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy* [hereinafter cited parenthetically as *HMP*], trans. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 153; SW, I/10: 151.

<sup>19</sup> 'Der schlimmste Mißverständnis, der ihr widerfahren konnte, war der, daß sie, nach Analogie anderer Systeme, ein Prinzip habe, vor [von] welchem, als einem selbstwahren, die Wahrheit auf die anderen Teile des Systems abfließe.'

<sup>20</sup> Manfred Frank, 'What is Early German Romantic Philosophy? [hereinafter cited parenthetically as GRP],' *The Relevance of Romanticism: Essays on German Romantic Philosophy*, ed. Dalia Nassar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

his subjective idealism—an “I” that was boosted into something absolute’ (GRP, 26). For the Jena philosophers, including Schelling, the subjective absolute could not serve as a clear ground because it eluded clarity and thereby could not be contained within any domain, including the human subject. ‘Instead, they considered subjectivity to be a derivative phenomenon that only becomes accessible to itself under a condition or presupposition (*Bedingung, Voraussetzung*), which is beyond its (subjectivity’s) control’ (GRP, 18).

Rather than a foundationalist approach that derives everything from the absolute subject, the Romantics held to the ‘irrepresentability of the Absolute and redefined striving after the infinite as an endless striving’ (GRP, 18). This not only liberated thinking from its obsession with the human subject as the inevitable starting point for all that is cognized, but it also cracked the negativity of the subject-object correlation and first opened up the problem of existence. In a way, this also anticipated some aspects of what contemporary speculative realists call the problem of correlationism, which Quentin Meillassoux defined as ‘the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other’ and hence ‘disqualifying the claim that it is possible to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another.’<sup>21</sup>

Frank grounded a speculative realism—what he calls an ‘ontological realism’ (27)—in the structure of self-consciousness itself, which in reflection discovers within itself ‘the notion of the essence of absolute identity as enclosing a ground that repels all consciousness’ (GRP, 22). This ground cannot operate as a first principle from which we can derive systematically all other principles nor can it be reduced to anything in particular, not even the absolute ‘I.’ It simultaneously prohibits all dogmatic claims: ‘If there is no safe foundation that presents itself to our consciousness as evident, then it is possible to doubt each of our beliefs’ (GRP, 23). The ground in both Reinhold and Fichte’s systems therefore ‘loses its stabilizing function’ (GRP, 25). What emerges is a speculative realism that (a) is not derived from the subject as a stabilizing ground and

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<sup>21</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), 5.

(b) renders the objects of knowledge only speculatively knowable. Beliefs, Friedrich Schlegel claimed, 'are eternally valid only for the time being' (GRP, 24), or, put in a more contemporary way, are *necessarily contingent*. After his rupture with Fichte, Schelling continuously thought toward this sovereign and destabilizing ground, but the task is not merely to discover this ground at the heart of reason, but also to learn to think *from* it.

Negative philosophy, either of a subjective or an objective kind, does not proceed from the *Prius*. It thinks the *Prius* as an idea and as the omega but not as the alpha of thinking. Perhaps, in the end, Schelling conceded, negative philosophy was only a 'poetic invention,' a '*poetische Erfindung [...] ein Gedicht, das die Vernunft selbst gedichtet*' (PN, 115). Indeed, 'the whole only happened in thought [*das Ganze war nur im Gedanken vollzogen*]' (PN, 116). This science '*is a merely logical science* [*ist eine bloß logische Wissenschaft*]' (PN, 117). This does not make it merely analytical, left only to deduce the logical relations among ideas, because, although it does not proceed from the alpha, it proceeds toward and arrives at the alpha as the omega of this science. That being said, *Naturphilosophie* is not in the end concerned with the 'now and here' of any actually existing plants, but rather with the genus and species [*Gattungen und Arten*] of plants. It is concerned with ideas, not bare existence. Sensuous plants that sit on my table exist outside of their thought 'as being able to be outside of thinking [*als außer dem Denken sein könnende*]' (PN, 118).<sup>22</sup> One could not even say that negative philosophy was the kind of hardcore account of idealism that Kant refuted (that nothing exists outside our experience of them) since it was not concerned with experience at all (PN, 119–120). Hegel's mistake, despite all of his brilliance, was not that he misunderstood negative philosophy but rather that he attempted to make it into what it is not: positive philosophy. God becomes the dialectical process itself and hence 'He is the God of eternal action, but he always does only what he has done [*Er ist der Gott des ewigen Tuns, aber der immer nur tut, was er getan hat*]' (PN, 133). Hegel's

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<sup>22</sup> From the Munich lectures on modern philosophy: 'Everything can be in the logical Idea without anything being *explained* thereby, as, for example, everything in the sensuous world is grasped in number and measure, which does not therefore mean that geometry or arithmetic explain the sensuous world.' There remains that which 'strives beyond the boundaries' of reason (*Vernunft*) (HMP, 147; SW, I/10: 144).

position does not own up to its 'honest poverty [*ehrenhafter Armut*]' (PN, 137), indeed to the poverty of negative thought as such.

Not only is negative philosophy not positive philosophy, it is not in the final analysis even the ground of positive philosophy. Negative philosophy does not end where positive philosophy begins if by that one means that it establishes the grounding principle of the project of positive philosophy. 'The end of one is not the beginning of the other [*das Ende der einen ist nicht Anfang der andern*]' (PN, 138). Negative philosophy ends in freedom, but that is not the principle of positive philosophy, but rather its *Aufgabe* or task (PN, 138), a task already inaugurated in the 1809 Freedom Essay as Schelling endeavored to think the problem of human freedom from the alpha of freedom as such. In this regard, negative philosophy becomes occupied with *Wegschaffen*, removal, making possible 'the perpetual putsch of reason [*der fortwährende Umsturz der Vernunft*]' (PN, 152) so that thinking originates in an 'absolute beginning' (PN, 153). Just as the Cabiri initiates discovered, thinking and living from this secret ground was not merely an academic exercise. 'Negative philosophy is for school but positive philosophy is for life' (PN, 153).

Positive philosophy is, in a manner of speaking, something like a kind of *mystical empiricism*, but not in the sense that its ground is derived from experience, mystical or otherwise, but rather in the sense that experience is understood to concretize and express the free movement and life of the *a priori*. It should in no way be confused with any form of mysticism as such, which Schelling eschews in the positive philosophy as precisely what cannot speak concretely, what cannot proceed from the mystical to the empirical. In the Munich lectures on the history of modern philosophy (1827), Schelling decries the indolent and reckless invocation of mysticism as an act of what we would now call *mystification*. Every time that we do not understand something, we invoke the mystery or regard our intellectual fuzziness as mystical. Hence, Schelling regarded mysticism as 'a hatred of clear insight' (HMP, 185; SW, I/10: 192). The term itself, το μυστικόν, can, however, mark the accomplishment of negative philosophy insofar as it simply marks the hidden and concealed, but this would simply be an idea of the hidden and, in a way, *the hidden merely as an idea, not a life*. Only in this strict sense we can say that the ground of nature (*natura naturans*) is secret and as such mystical (HMP, 183–185; SW, I/10: 190–192).

Positive philosophy is therefore also a kind of *a priori empiricism*, in which the latter plays out the former. In a sense, experience is always open; it always preserves its future and, as such, the life of experience is an ‘ongoing proof [*ein fortgehender Beweis*]’ of God (PN, 147), which relegates reason to ‘reason that lets be [*die gelassene Vernunft*]’ (PN, 157). What is this *a priori*? What begins any possible beginning? Schelling is clear: ‘*But I posit being before all ideas and exclude all ideas* [Ich setze aber das Sein vor aller Idee, schließe all Idee aus]’ (PN, 159). In this respect, Schelling’s positive philosophy resonates with Deleuze when he spoke of his own empiricism as ‘a mysticism and mathematicism of concepts.’<sup>23</sup> The ground of such mystical empiricism is resolutely transcendent, but this is not to say that it is based on an *idea of transcendence*, a supreme concept that grounds all other concepts. That is mere relative transcendence. Positive philosophy’s transcendence is ‘absolute and resolute’ (PN, 159). Negative philosophy’s content is, therefore, the ‘a priori conceivable being [*a priori begreifliche Sein*],’ while that of positive philosophy is the ‘a priori inconceivable being that it a posteriori makes into the conceptual [*a priori unbegreifliche Sein, damit es a posteriori zum Begreiflichen werde*]’ (PN, 159–160).

Hence Schelling discloses in Berlin what was also already at the heart of his unpublished *Weltalter* project: ‘*das unvordenkliche Sein, als allem Denken vorausgehend* [the **unprethinkable** being as what precedes all thinking]’ (PN, 161). Its task is to proceed from what has always already not yet been thought. ‘What is the beginning of all thinking is not yet thinking [*Was der Anfang alles Denkens ist, ist noch nicht das Denken*]’ (PN, 161). There is no idea that gives rise to philosophic thought. Its inception begins with a shock or fissuring of the quotidian cogitation that we conventionally but stupidly consider to be thinking. Thinking is occasioned, as Plato and Aristotle had also seen, by wonder, *admiratio*, θαυμάζειν (PN, 161). Here one awakens to the erotic dimension of what is merely destitute in its negative exercise. As in the famous *Symposium* myth (203b–203d) in which Ἔρως is the child of Πόρος and Πενία, Plenty and Destitution (see AW3, 31; SW, I/8: 244),<sup>24</sup> positive philosophy

<sup>23</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), xx; *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968), 3.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Considered in itself, Nature is like Πενία showing up at Zeus’ feast. From the outside, Πενία was the picture of poverty and extreme need. On the inside, she shut away divine plenitude which she

gratefully desires what it can never have, but always wants in new ways. The idea is erotic in this strict, ontological sense: an intermediary between what it can never succeed in thinking and what it has just successfully thought. The penury of thinking confronts ever anew the unprethinkable Πόρος (passage, Plato's God of plenitude, the father of Eros) or *ewiger Anfang* (eternal beginning) or divine plenitude of thinking, producing the endless erotic offspring that are the inexhaustible life of thought. This is not idealism but more like what the Jena romantics (and Manfred Frank) called '*unendliche Annäherung*,' infinite approximation.<sup>25</sup>

## 4 Conclusion: 'Everything Is Hence Dionysus'

In the *Samothrace* address, Schelling spoke of the A<sup>1</sup> not as a mere figure of thought, but as the historical emergence in consciousness of Demeter's debilitating languor [*schmachtende Sehnsucht*], her penury and languishing and becoming sick, her loss of health and vitality. She is Axieros, which, according to Schelling, first means in the Phoenician dialect 'hunger,' 'poverty [*Armut*],' and as a consequence, 'languishing [*Schmachten*],' 'malaise [*Sucht*]' (SW, I/8: 351). This is Πενία, endlessly searching for means. 'For this is not to say that in the concept of *every* commencement there lies the concept of a lack [*Mangel*]. We hasten instead to recall something quite specific, to wit, Plato's figure of Penury, who, having mated with Superfluity, becomes the mother of Eros' (SW, I/8: 352).

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could not reveal until she had wed Wealth, Excess himself, that effusively and inexhaustibly garrulous being (A<sup>2</sup>). Even then, however, the child wrested from her womb appears under the form and, so to speak, press, of that originary negation. It was the bastard child of Need and Excess' (AW3, 31; SW, I/8: 244). At the birth of Aphrodite, they celebrated a great feast and Πόρος (literally, 'way,' 'passage,' 'resource,' which Schelling glosses as *Reichthum* and *Überfluß*, wealth and excess) became inebriated on nectar and passed out in Zeus' garden. Πενία ('poverty' or 'need'), showing up to beg, seduced Πόρος and had his child. A philosophical idea is such a child, an intermediary, neither wholly true nor wholly false, settling nothing yet always discovering something.

<sup>25</sup> See Manfred Frank, '*Unendliche Annäherung*,' *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997) as well as *Auswege aus dem deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007). 'Being, the late Schelling will say, is prior to thought ("unvordenklich"). In other words, there is no thought—no real predicate—that can be inserted or presupposed in order to function as a ground for deducing or grasping existence' (SW, II/3: 227f.; see also 262). GRP, 22.

This is also Ceres, who, before coming to be thought of as the plenitude of the bread of the earth, was for the Egyptians the queen of the dead, 'generally thought to be in a state of helplessness, of an impotent striving for actuality [*Zustand von Unvermögenheit und Kraftlosem Streben nach Wirklichkeit*]' (SW, I/8: 353).

The A<sup>2</sup> is associated with Axiokersa, Persephone, the power of magic, a word not related to *Macht*, some external power or efficient cause, but to *mögen*—to be able to do. Demeter becomes potent because she now has the means to express herself as her daughter. Persephone is not merely the existence of Persephone, but an expression of the Demeter who cannot otherwise appear. This is also the eruption of Dionysian power, in which as Schelling proclaimed at the end of *Die Weltalter*, 'Panthers or tigers do not pull the carriage of Dionysus in vain. For this wild frenzy of inspiration in which nature found itself when it was in view of the being was celebrated in the nature worship of prescient ancient peoples by the drunken festivals of Bacchic orgies' (AW3, 102–103; SW, I/8: 337).

A<sup>3</sup> reveals the Dionysian and erotic mystery at the heart of the belonging together of the two potencies. This is person of Axiokersos, Hades, Dionysus, as well as the Egyptian Osiris and the German Odin. 'This doctrine, according to which the *amiable* god Dionysus is Hades, is indisputably the felicitous conviction that was communicated by the mystery religions.' Finally all of the potencies can be thought in the existence of the A<sup>4</sup>, Kadmilos, Hermes, the 'mediator between the higher and the lower gods but not therefore the weakest of the four but rather the strongest of the four [...] Kadmilos is the last, but also the highest.' As such, all of the potencies are 'transfigured in one supreme personality [*in Eine höchste Persönlichkeit*]' who speaks as if a prophet or herald (SW, I/8: 359) of another manner of being altogether.

Schelling returned to the mystery religions in Berlin, whose 'main content [*Hauptinhalt*]' remained 'the reconciliation of the consciousness wounded from severance from the real God [*die Versöhnung des durch Trennung vom realen Gott verwundeten Bewußtseins*]' (PN, 230). It is the reconciliation of Demeter with her daughter (PN, 235), the bread of the earth with the earth itself, and toward this end we are given little bits of help along the way: Dionysus already knew what Jesus would later teach: 'Wine is the gift of the already spiritualizing God [*Der Wein ist*



*Geschenk des schon vergeistigenden Gottes*'] (PN, 234). Philosophy, if it is to take joy in existence, drinks this wine as its happy sacrament. The three figures of Dionysus (PN, 242) are nonetheless Dionysus.

This is indeed a revelation (PN, 248), and Dionysus in 'the highest potency was the meaning of the whole mystery teaching [*in der höchsten Potenz war der Sinn der ganzen Mysterienlehre*]' (PN, 248). This is the revelation that thinking, like the cosmos itself, is the Dionysian mystery: '*For everything is hence Dionysus; only in the tension do the potencies become different. That was the highest insight [So ist alles Dionysos, nur in der Spannung werden die Potenzen different. Das war die höchste Ansicht]*' (PN, 237).

The public revelation of Christianity, too, under the genealogical analysis of Schelling's gesture toward philosophical religion, is revealed to contain its own *Geheimlehre*, its own non-public *inner* possibilities (and by *inner* we do not mean Luther's reduction of interiority to human consciousness). The Johannine Church, the church for everyone and everything—for all things human and for the mysterious creativity of the earth itself—is the 'being everything in everything of God' (U, 708–709), a 'theism that contains within itself the entire economy of God' (U, 709). This religion, what Bataille would later call 'radical economy,' not only excludes nothing, but also includes everything as alive, where 'everything has its inner process for itself' (U, 710). This is religion beyond the dualism of the Petrine empire (the imposition of external forms of religion) and Pauline revolt (the recovery of the esoteric soul of religion). It is, so to speak, to activate philosophy by thinking the problem of existence beyond mere quiddities (what there is) and beyond their groundless ground (nothing ultimately explains *a priori* why they are what they are) so that the problem, why there is something rather nothing, is revealed to be the vital and discontinuous history of an inexplicable *Prius*, the κένωσις at the heart of a revelatory and speculative realism.

Now the question poses itself: What remains alive in Schelling's philosophical religion? In what ways, if any, can it still speak to us today? All of this discourse may appear well nigh impossible to us. Today's world, with all of its religious fractiousness and disillusionment, is seemingly too late to excavate Dionysus and Jesus as the *Geheimlehre* that will one day become a paradoxically *public secret* that reveals and preserves the joy that



we take in the fecundity and inexhaustible earth of existence. For those who read it, it risks falling upon deaf ears just like it did at the time of his much anticipated ascent to Berlin so many decades ago. Yet even if we refuse the turn to the philosophy of mythology and revelation, we must admit that what remains, however we name it, is the secret that animates the creativity of our art works, the patience and devotion of our scientific researches, and the utopian hint that is at the impetus of our desire to philosophize.<sup>26</sup> Schelling's method of experimental philosophy, of radical empiricism, with its call to the dark, drunken, and maddening powers of the intellect, continues to resonate with us.

But need we pronounce such a negative verdict on Schelling's philosophical religion, as has been done historically and recently? Could it not be the case that we are, instead, more prepared for it or something like it than ever before despite the religious fractiousness and disillusionment of our culture? As our prevailing modes of human habitation continue to ravage the earth that gives us our very possibility of being at all, I submit that it is incumbent upon us to continue to find language for this paradoxically public secret that simultaneously reveals and preserves the joy we take in the fecundity and inexhaustible earth of existence. We must make philosophical religion part of our efforts to respond to a crisis whose depths invite us to rethink the 'religious' dimensions of the problem, however difficult they may be amid the ruins of its traditional forms. For in finding these dimensions, we are likely to find new solutions through the expansion of consciousness. This is precisely what Schelling, with great audacity, attempted in his own times and why he remains of immense importance for us today. What is it that calls us to philosophize as part of reawakening and rekindling our love for the earth? Indeed, this task may seem as quixotic as Schelling's return to Berlin, but to ignore it is catastrophic.

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<sup>26</sup>For more on the interrelation of science, art, and religion, see my 'Nature of Imagination: At the Heart of Schelling's Thinking,' *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism*, ed. Matthew C. Altman (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 457–477, as well as chapter six of my *Schelling's Practice of the Wild: Time, Art, Imagination* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015).

# 13

## Beyond Modernity: The Lasting Challenge of German Idealism

Konrad Utz

### 1 Introduction

Let us put the fine artist pencils aside and start using big, broad brushes. The canvas we want to paint is huge and our time is limited. If we ask about the challenge German Idealism still poses to current philosophical thinking, we must first understand the challenges it answered in its own time and then the tasks it left open to us. I will include Kant in my considerations because the general, underlying tendencies in the philosophies of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel cannot be understood without him.

Modernity can be characterized under three aspects: the thematic, the formal, and the methodological. Thematically, its major concern was human being or, in more abstract terms, the finite subject—instead of God or the cosmos in its natural order. Of course, modernity was very much concerned about nature. However, it approached it starting from the human point of view, from experience, rather than from Platonic

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forms or Aristotelian essences.<sup>1</sup> Even in theology, namely in Protestant theology, the concern was less and less about what God is in himself and more, often exclusively, about the relation between him and the individual human being with an increasing emphasis on concepts like salvation, justification, grace, and faith. That is, God was treated, once again, from the human perspective.

Formally, modernity had two general tendencies, one towards individualization and one towards universalization. These may seem opposed at first sight, and modernity mostly understood them in this way and thus constantly engaged in various battles of ‘the individual vs. the universal.’<sup>2</sup> However, deep down, they are in fact complementary. Examples are the ethical priority of the individual person as such on the one hand and universal human rights on the other or individual experiences on the one hand and universal natural laws on the other. The tension is not so much between the individual and the universal, but between these two and the particular: the distinctive or special, that which is neither universal nor individual. In the middle ages, it was decisive to which family you belonged, to which class, profession, dominion, ethnic group, and so on. Not all of this disappeared with modernity, of course, but the tendency was to see all this as less and less important and to maintain that reality, morality, and political society is or should essentially consist of individuals existing and living under universal laws. This tendency was so strong that in English there is not even a word left that unequivocally names the particular. This term also came to denote that which is opposed to the universal, that is, typically individuals and then—depending on one’s ontology—states of affairs, tropes, and events. In the following, I will use the term ‘particular’ in the Hegelian sense of ‘*Besonderes*’: as that which stands *between* the individual and the universal, as that which is distinctive neither in a purely individual way, nor only in a universal or conceptual way.<sup>3</sup> I’ll say more about this below.

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<sup>1</sup> We might mention da Vinci, Kepler, Bacon, and Galilei.

<sup>2</sup> This is one fundamental reason why the history of modernity essentially is a history of oppositions.

<sup>3</sup> See *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline Part I: Science of Logic*, ed. and trans. Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010),

The third, methodological characteristic of modern thinking is perhaps not as evident as the other ones. Nevertheless, it is present, in different forms, in all its main currents, empiricist and rationalist likewise. It is self-reference. In more existential terms, self-reference asserts itself as freedom. As such, it can be seen as the grand, central, and unifying theme of German Idealism.

Descartes paradigmatically exposes all these aspects. The cogito expounds the self-referring subject as a sheer individual (not only as an individual person, but also in an individual act of thinking, since the certainty of the 'I think' has validity only for the very moment in which it is performed) in the quality of a sheer universal: as thinking substance (the distinction between thinking and extended substance is the most fundamental in Cartesian ontology). German Idealism can be seen as the culminating point of modernity because it tries to unite all its fundamental aspects in one grand systematic theory.

## 2 Essential Finite Realization

European rationalism also tries to establish the Grand Systematic Theory. However, from Descartes to Leibniz and Wolff, the rationalists did not manage to do so without seeking refuge in the old, pre-modern principles of God and naturally given order. In its turn, German Idealism tries to show that you can have all that is dear to modernity by basing yourself on nothing but the subject. With this, the subject itself becomes in a certain sense the highest good, the supreme value, and the supreme expression of this value is freedom. Especially the philosophies of Kant and the early Fichte can be seen as attempts, previously unheard of, to base a 'Theory of Everything' on a finite principle: the finite subject, in other words, you and me. The later Fichte as well as Schelling and Hegel do fall back on the Absolute. In so doing, however, they keep the insight that the subject is irreducibly different from all other reality. And they maintain that, in a certain sense, the finite, individual subject is essential to the Absolute

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121 f., §74), 132, §82, 239 f., §164; *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 12, ed. Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968–), 32–48.

itself, that the Absolute can only fully realize itself in virtue of these subjects. We could call this ‘the essential moment of finite realization’ thesis.<sup>4</sup> It is for this precise reason that history becomes important in Fichte and, to an even greater extent, in Schelling and Hegel, and also why art is a central theme in the latter two. History and art are the finite realizations of subjects like you and me.

Finite realization already appears in Kant, but there it remains formal. The act of knowing in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is a paradigmatic example of it. As is well known, this act is not merely receptive in Kant. However, it is not merely computational either. The act of transcendental apperception *constitutes* the object of knowledge. It does so only formally; it does not *create* its object. Nevertheless, there is no object without this act. More than this, there is no empirical world without this act. Therefore, this act, though *a priori* in form, is concrete, finite, and specific. It is a perfect example of a finite realization that is essential: the possibility of an empirical object and an empirical world would not even exist without this act. The act of transcendental apperception does not just actualize a pre-determined possibility. It constitutes this very possibility. It does not just enact a rule, a possible way of proceeding. It opens up a domain of rules and order, of concepts and possibilities. It opens up the domain of the empirical. It does so not universally, once and for all, but in every single subject, in every single act of knowing. The fundamental structure of the world as we know it—which is the empirical world—is not read off the cosmic, natural order, but is instead constituted by the subject in a finite act. And the subject *has* to do so. The same holds for morality. The finite subject’s own law giving, its autonomy, establishes the moral law: it is not given to the subject by God, nor is it discovered in or read off cosmic, natural order.

As with many other fundamental concepts—for example, freedom, subjectivity, or pure self-knowledge—the idea of an essential finite realization was first developed in theology. The paradigm case is the realization

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<sup>4</sup> Just to make a contrast: typical examples of infinite realization would be the *noesis noeseos* of Aristotle’s unmoved mover, the begetting of the son by the father in Trinitarian theology, or the beatific vision of God in eternal life. The creation of the world also is infinite or at least non-finite realization if it is conceived of as the beginning of space and time—and not as an event in space and time.

of salvation in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Lesser cases are the sacraments. However, theologians thought that only God could enact anything really essential. Kant dared to conceive that it is we, finite subjects, who had the power to do so.

Fichte frees essential finite realization from being merely formal. Under this aspect, Fichte is the supreme hero of modernity. In the *Science of Knowledge* of 1794, the subject's act of self-positing is the origin of *everything*. This position is so incredible that not even Fichte himself dared to stick to it in later years. But it marks the utmost extreme, the highest point, you can reach traveling in this direction. As I already hinted, Schelling and Hegel (and the late Fichte) 'domesticate' such finite realization by reintroducing the idea of the Absolute. However, they maintain that this realization is effected by subjects and that, even though subjectivity may be fully developed only in the Absolute Subject, this subjectivity it is also ours as finite subjects. Therefore, our realizations in space and time retain something of the absolute essentiality Fichte attributes to it. And they foreshadow or manifest something of the essence of the Absolute Subject (or Subject-Object) that Schelling and Hegel themselves assumed as a supreme principle.

### 3 Subjectivity

Descartes had already put the subject at the center of philosophy. However, he still conceived of it in 'non-subjectual,' ontological, pre-modern terms. He thought of it as a substance, a thinking thing. Kant shows that the subject is essentially different from everything else, since everything else can be given to it as something, but only itself can be given to it as itself. This means that the very givenness of subjectivity is different from that of everything else. A subject is something that is non-objectively given—it is not a thing.<sup>5</sup> Later, Schelling and Hegel will seek to reconcile and reunite

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<sup>5</sup> See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B 157, B 423. Of course, more would have to be said about this. In Kant, for instance, the subject can know itself also objectively through inner perception. However, the point of reference for the identification of this objective, empirical information about myself can only be transcendental self-consciousness, which is non-objective (see B 155).

objectivity and subjectivity, substantiality and spirituality. However, they do so not because they disregard the fundamental difference, but because they see that, precisely because of the fundamental nature of the difference, there must be also a way to bridge it.

So the core characteristic of subjectivity is its actual givenness to itself: its self-consciousness. Kant states this very clearly in his *Transcendental Deduction* (the B-edition).<sup>6</sup> The self only is a self in virtue of its capacity to be self-conscious. It need not always be explicitly self-conscious. (It need not be even always be conscious.) But every actualization of the self must have an implicit or transcendental relation to self-consciousness. It must be such that the subject could also be explicitly self-conscious about this actualization.<sup>7</sup> However, since this possibility is given only under certain conditions, these conditions hold universally for any actualization of the subject. Kant holds that the fundamental condition of the possibility of any actualization to be accompanied by self-consciousness is unity, since self-consciousness is necessarily one. But we need not enter into this here.

The next step is that everything different from the subject is accessible to the subject only if the subject can actually relate to it. Since *we* are subjects, all of *our* knowledge and deeds—all of *our* theory and practice—are only possible inasmuch as that which they deal with can actually relate to us. However, to be able to relate to us, something must conform to the conditions of the possibility of self-consciousness. Therefore, everything that is accessible to us falls under these conditions.

This is the fundamental thesis of German Idealism from Kant to Hegel. Kant thought that not everything necessarily falls under that condition. Things in themselves do not—or at least we cannot know if they do or do not. Therefore, we only have access to the empirical world, the world as it is constituted by the conditions of the possibility of our understanding,

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<sup>6</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 132, B 157.

<sup>7</sup> This is a conceptual possibility: The actualization must be such that, in principle, it can be accompanied by self-consciousness, such that it is conceptually compatible with the latter, or such that it can be combined with self-consciousness in one discursive thought (like: 'I think that this rose is red'). It need not be the case that every subject at every time is practically *capable* of effecting this thought. Very young children are incapable of it; adults while dreaming are incapable of it; so are most animals; and so on.

which are, in last instance, the conditions of the possibility our being self-conscious in this picture. This is transcendental idealism. Fichte thought that the subject imposes its conditions not only on the empirical world, but also on the real world. This is objective idealism. Schelling and Hegel followed him, but they thought that the finite subject is not equal to the task. There must be an Absolute Subject that imposes its conditions on the world, and we finite subjects have access to it because we are somehow like this Absolute Subject or participate in it or are even, in some sense, identical to it. However, even if the fundamental, conditioning subject is absolute, its conditions always refer to its actual self-consciousness, its knowing self-reference.

There are several interesting points that deserve to be highlighted in the preceding. One fundamental point is that we only need *conditioning* by the subject. We do not need *creation* or *total determination*. This opens the possibility for an irreducible finite realization *even if* we take the conditioning subject to be absolute, like in Schelling and Hegel. Not everything is fixed beforehand by God. If the subject conditions only with regard to reference to its self-consciousness, then such things as history, art, and freedom can have ‘real meaning’: they constitute *reality*, which is not predetermined by the Absolute by either necessity or possibility. They are not just realizations of possibilities foreseen by the Absolute; they are not just moves in a game the possibility of that can be calculated beforehand. *They are something original.*

## 4 Freedom

This is why the German Idealists experienced their own philosophy as liberating. In short, this is why for all of them freedom is the highest concept. In Kant, this freedom remains formal, since his idealism remains formal; it is only a *transcendental* idealism. As is well known, Kantian freedom is autonomy, and Kantian autonomy means to implement the moral law for oneself. However, the moral law is formal: the categorical imperative is an abstract rule to select maxims, which are the concrete motivational principles of action that the subject possesses. In this way, Kantian freedom remains restricted to morality, since his concept of



conditioning with reference to self-consciousness does not go beyond the realm of subjective reality, that is, the realm of our experiences and our '*Gesinnung*' or practical mindset.

This all changes when Fichte makes the subject's conditioning not only the conditioning of its own, inner realm, but of reality as such. With this, freedom becomes real. The main imperative of freedom now is exactly the imperative to become real: 'act!' This is precisely the imperative not to limit our freedom to determine our '*Gesinnung*,' to formally determine ways of action, should circumstances demand us to decide about such things as telling the truth or not, paying back debts or not, and so on. Fichte's imperative is the imperative to actualize *spontaneously* our freedom in the real world, to change this world, to create new realities—realities that conform to our rational, free will.

Schelling and Hegel keep this insight: freedom is not just something within the innermost sanctum of the subject. Freedom is something that is realized in space and time, in biographies and history, in social life and institutions. And freedom *has* to be realized in such a way; it implies an imperative that is now properly speaking self-referring insofar as it is now an imperative to *not* remain formal, internal, potential, but instead to *realize itself*. It is essential to freedom that it urges itself to create its own reality in space and time, a spiritual but nevertheless objective reality of rights and duties, of values and social identities, of social and political structures, of art, religion, and human history.

However, there is one fundamental limitation to the conception of freedom in German Idealism. This has to do with the neglect of the particular that characterizes all modernity and that even German Idealists were not able to overcome. In a certain sense, this deficiency becomes even more palatable in them precisely because they push the principles of modernity to the utmost limit. In Kant, real freedom—different from *liberum arbitrium*—is autonomy, and autonomy means that the rational subject establishes the form of its practical reason, that is, of its 'will,' as a law for itself. The form of the will (in the Kantian sense) is the capacity to act under the representation of a law. Therefore, the principle of freedom is to act in such a way that not only your instrumental principles, but also the motivational principle of your act have the form of a representation of a law. That is, to act in such a way that your act according to its form

could really be a law, a universal, necessary practical principle that binds everybody. This is a paradigm case of what I call ‘individuo-universalism’: The pure, intellectual, individuals, by referring to themselves, constitute the universal *by* themselves and *for* themselves, the very universal law that decrees the form of the universal, necessary law as the necessary (practical) principle for *every* rational individual everywhere. This is fantastic (in *both* senses of the word). And it is also completely insufficient. Freedom is, paradoxically, reduced to necessity. Necessity is freedom because it is constituted by the very individual it binds. Nevertheless, it remains necessity. And this will not change until Hegel. Schelling is a certain exception. He senses the insufficiency of Kantian freedom by identifying what is missing: the aspect of choice.<sup>8</sup> This is precisely the aspect of the particular within freedom. Whenever you can reduce the particular to the universal, more exactly to the universal law of morality or (in Hegel) of ethical substance, there is no choice. If the particular situation with its possibilities of action is wholly analyzable in universal terms, there remains nothing to do but to apply the universal law to it, thus to find out what is the ‘Right Thing’ to do, and do it. In my view, Schelling’s attempts to amend this deficiency are not satisfactory; he does not really overcome the gap between universality, individuality, and particularity. But I cannot go into this here. Instead, I want to go back to the problem of the particular, which this brief allusion to Schelling allows me to bring into relief.

## 5 The Particular

What is the particular? It is that which is *specifically* distinct from another. An individual is *unspecifically* distinct from any other. Hence, it is ineffable, as traditional ontology said. You cannot say what a specific

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<sup>8</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 22 f., 48–51; SW, I/7: 331–416, see 351 f., 382–385. Citations of Schelling provide the pagination of the English translation followed by that of the *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, 14 vols, ed. Karl Friedrich August Schelling (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J. G. Cotta, 1856–61). References to the K.F.A. Schelling edition are given by the abbreviation SW, division, volume and page number.

individual is *as such*, since *as such* it has no specifications—other than being different from everything but itself. A universal, on the other hand, is something that ‘unites’ (or is able to unite) different individuals.<sup>9</sup> In language, universals appear as concepts as diverse as ‘tree,’ ‘atom,’ ‘beautiful,’ or ‘red.’ There are many individual trees that fall under the concept of ‘tree’ and thus are united by it. The universal ‘tree’ is one and the same with regard to all of them. However, the universal unites individuals in a ‘non-particular’ way. It is not built up from the bottom, like a group is built up from its members. The universal is given by itself, and whatever happens to fall under its extension is united by it as part of its extension. The universal as such is indifferent to its extension.<sup>10</sup> It may even be given without any instantiation, that is, without any individual falling under its extension, like the concept of ‘phlogiston.’ There is no way of inference from the universal to the individuals under its extension; the universal does not inform us about its extension.<sup>11</sup> Of course, universals must be *particularly* distinctive from one another. Otherwise, there could be only one universal: the absolutely indistinctive universal that unites absolutely everything.

As I have said, modernity has the tendency to disregard the particular. Modernity is fervently captivated by the question whether the universal should be favored above the individual or vice versa. But almost all of its representatives agree that the particular does not need consideration. At first glance, this agreement seems all too obvious. If you are a lover of universals, a so-called realist about universals, or if you accept universals as given realities, what are particular distinctions? Nothing but subordinate universals. Whenever two individuals fall under one universal, say two trees, whenever they are specifically distinct, there is a universal of that distinction, a universal concept under which one of the two falls and the other one not. It could be, for example, that one tree has needles while the other one has leaves. In that case, the first falls under

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<sup>9</sup>This is, of course, a very simplified account. Universals can apply not only to individuals, but to other universals as well.

<sup>10</sup>Likewise, those who fall under this extension are indifferent to one another with regard to this unity. They are not *specifically* united, just formally, abstractly united.

<sup>11</sup>Hegel holds that this is not true for all concepts. The concept of ‘concept,’ for example, necessarily falls under its own extension. This can be dialectically ‘inferred’ from this concept itself.

the concept of 'coniferous' and the second does not. In the next step, this conception leads to Leibniz' principle of identity: If two individuals are distinct, that is, if they are really two and not one, there must be at least one particular distinction that the one has and the other does not. Otherwise, the two are identical. If particular distinctions are taken to be universals, then everything is individuated by universals. This appears to work remarkably well for individuals: Every individual must be distinct from every other individual by at least one universal (be it a property or a relation) that applies to it but not to the other (or vice versa). In this way, the lover of universals can 'reduce' individuals to universals. Nonetheless, the reduction is not complete; he has to keep the individual as such as the intersection of the various extensions of different concepts. However, this individual is something very weak, something very empty and abstract. It cannot do or be anything by itself, for all the real work is done by the universals. The problem in this model is the individuation or distinction of the universals. It is immediately obvious that we run into an infinite regress if particular distinctions are taken to be universals. The concepts of 'woman' and 'man' are united by the concept of 'human being' and are distinct with regard to the concept of 'gender.' But 'human being' and 'gender' are specific concepts as well, so they need other concepts to keep them distinct from any other concept—and so on. To distinguish universals, we need concepts that 'already' are distinct. However, distinction that is not universal is particular distinction. And if there must be particular distinction that is not reducible to universal distinction, then the particular is not reducible to the universal.

If you are a lover of individuals, a so-called nominalist, you will say that universals are nothing but groupings of individuals. You reduce universals to their extensions. If you are a radical nominalist, you will say that these groupings occur only in our mind or in our language. Nothing corresponds to them in reality; in fact, there are only pure, simple, bare individuals. Such a position is very radical indeed because it is difficult to see how, in this case, our thinking and talking could be about reality insofar as they always use concepts.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, nominalists who think

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<sup>12</sup> Again, I leave subtleties aside: There are, for example, sentences without concepts, like 'this is Peter' or 'Joseph Ratzinger is Benedict XVI.' However, it seems like we cannot give or handle names

that human knowledge (in the common sense) is possible admit that these groupings exist in reality, normally in the form of sets, and they take these groupings or sets to be individuals: complex individuals, individuals made up of individuals. These nominalists think they have vanquished universals completely. This is not the case. To substitute universals for complex individuals, you still need the 'universe' or absolute universality, the definite whole of all individuals. The number of individuals within this whole may be infinite. But it has to be 'closed,' 'definite.' There must be no possibilities outside this definite whole. Otherwise, the groupings or sets would not be definite. However, universals are the only way to deal with indefinite groupings, since they are indifferent to their instances—but nominalists do not want to take universals for real. Normally, the definite, universal whole nowadays goes by the name of 'logical space.' The name does not really matter, but it is essential to see that moderate nominalism cannot do without such a definite whole of everything (including possibilities). Now, it is easy to see that this universal definite whole cannot be one more grouping, one more set, and thus one more individual. If it is one more individual, it has to be included into the universal definite whole; otherwise it is not the universal definite whole. If it is included, we have a new set or grouping; so we have a new individual—and so on. Moderate nominalism needs exactly the one universal I talked about before, the universal that is completely 'particular-free': the absolutely indistinctive universal that unites absolutely everything. In this way, moderate nominalism is similar to realism about universals: This realism needs to keep an abstract, weak, feeble rest of the individual as that which unites universal distinctions, while nominalism needs to keep an abstract, weak, feeble remainder of the universal as the ultimate unity of everything.

But what about the particular? The problem with universals without particulars is, as I have said, that they reduce to one single, indistinctive universal (it is up to you if you want to call this a universal at all). The problem with individuals without particulars is that they are only abstractly distinct. If we follow Leibniz's principle, they are not distinct at all.

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without concepts, so even these sentences presuppose the use of concepts, even if they do not employ concepts themselves.

Complex individuals (groupings or sets) do not help, since they presuppose distinct individuals. If we accept, against Leibniz, that individuals can be given and can be different from one another all by themselves, without particular distinction, we have individuals *all by themselves* and nothing more. They have no connection whatsoever to one to another. They are not united by complex individuals (groupings or sets), since these also are individuals—and nothing but individuals. There is no *relation* between complex individuals and their constituents (for example, the relation of ‘being an element of’), since this relation would have to be another grouping or set, hence another complex individual, hence nothing but another individual all by itself. The one universal that unites absolutely everything, which is implicit in moderate nominalism, also cannot help because it unites absolutely indistinctively. The conclusion is as follows: We cannot do without the particular—without the irreducibly particular, the particular that is not, *strictly speaking*, a universal or an individual or some combination of the two. Reality itself cannot do without the individual—if we take it to have anything distinctive to do with our thinking and talking about it.

As I said, German Idealism is completely modern in that it favors the individual and the universal. But it is grand enough to leave some space for the particular. It just maintains that the particular is powerless against the combined onslaught of the universal and the individual. The particular first appears in Kant as the manifold. This is how the particular shows up as that which is opposed to individuality and universality. Hence, the manifold is its typical form of appearance as seen from the individual-universalistic standpoint: a *plurality* of distinctions that cannot be reduced to individuals on the one hand and on universals or combinations of universals on the other. The manifold appears in Kant as the content of intuition under the *a priori* forms of space and time. This manifold is then conceptualized by understanding as an object, that is, as an individual under universals. In Fichte, the manifold appears as the Not-I. This time, the I is challenged to conquer the manifold in the course of history, establishing its own order in that which is not itself: in the Not-I. Of course, this can be never done completely, so there is, at least in the Fichte of the 1794 *Science of Knowledge*, the awareness that the manifold never will be totally conquered. Of all the German Idealists, Schelling is the one who

gives most scope to the manifold and to irreducible difference. In many variations, he presents 'bi-polar' systems of which spirit, with its unity of individuality and universality, presents only one side. The other side is nature.<sup>13</sup> However, he seeks the mediation of these two in an absolute principle, which consequently leads him to the mysticism he favors in later years, since such an Absolute cannot be conceptually comprehended any more. It has to be 'taken,' 'believed,' spiritually experienced. Hegel is the one who, in my view, articulates most clearly the necessity of the particular. However, against Schelling, he thinks that it can be mediated with the individual and the universal if it is 'bracketed' by them in the discursive process that he calls 'dialectics.' He agrees that the real, irreducible, original particular must make its entry at some point. But he thinks this point can be a point within a process and thus a point that may and must be overcome. The dialectical process goes on beyond the standpoint of the particular and reaches a higher point, the point of an individual that in itself is a universal, the paradigm of which is the subject. In this higher comprehension, the particular is just the middle or turning point of the process by which the individuo-universal self-referentially determines itself. This middle point is absolutely necessary, but it is completely tamed because it is completely absorbed or 'sublated' (*aufgehoben*) in the result of the process that goes beyond it. Thus, even Hegel does not recognize the fundamental necessity and irreducibility of the particular. Even he remains *thoroughly* modern, even though he has a clear notion of the non-modern in the guise of the particular—but only as that which must be overcome, historically as well as logically.

It is important to see that essential moment of finite realization as I described above is not sufficient to guarantee the irreducibility of the particular. As long as philosophers hold that whatever is realized is an individual or a universal or an individuo-universal, the finitude of its realization

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<sup>13</sup> At least, this is the basic dichotomy in Schelling's mature identity-philosophy as exposed in: *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* [1801], in *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence (1800–1802)*, ed. and trans. Michael G. Vater and David W. Wood (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012); SW, I/4: 105–212; *Bruno, or On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things* [1802], trans. Michael G. Vater (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984); SW, I/4: 213–332; *System of the Entire Philosophy and the Philosophy of Nature* [1804], SW, I/6: 131–214. Cf. also the earlier *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* [1797], trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); SW, I/2: 1–345. I cannot enter here into the complicated discussion of the development of Schelling's thought.

alone does not save particularity. This is best explained by concrete examples. As I said, essential finite realization typically shows up in philosophical theories as an interest in history, art, and religion. Of course, all these *may* be taken as typical manifestations of the particular. However, this is not necessarily the case. Just as well, a philosopher may strive to explain them as manifestations of something universal or individual. This is what Hegel does. Some people nowadays misunderstand Hegel because they think that, when he talks about history and art and about every philosophy being the product of its epoch, Hegel confesses being a post-modern pluralist.<sup>14</sup> But this is just not the case. You can be deeply interested in finite realizations and hold them to be essential and still strive to explain them in universal (or individuo-universal) terms. This is what Hegel does, and Fichte and Kant as his predecessors do not go any further. The only philosopher of German Idealism who has a notion of the true irreducibility of the particular in finite realization is Schelling.<sup>15</sup> Consequentially, this notion led him beyond German Idealism—I do not think that his late philosophy can still be put under this heading. However, the late Schelling falls back onto the two radical Others of individuo-universalistic explanation: on mythology and mysticism. I do not think that this is a solution, for various reasons, mainly because it presents us with the option of particularity *as opposed* to individuo-universalism, and mere opposition will not help us, as all three can only be given and understood in their interrelation.

## 6 The Rise of the Particular

With this, we have already arrived at the post-idealist half of modernity. This epoch was characterized by the rise of the particular. Technically speaking, it was more of a bubbling up, at different times, in different forms, in different philosophical communities. Chronologically, the reappearance of

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<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer, *Hegels Analytische Philosophie. Die Wissenschaft der Logik als kritische Theorie der Bedeutung* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1992) or J.N. Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-Examination* (New York: Humanities Press, 1958).

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, F.W.J. Schelling, *Initia philosophiae universae. Erlanger Vorlesung WS 1820/21*, ed. H. Fuhrmans (Bonn: Bouvier 1969). See also, Christian Iber, *Das Andere der Vernunft als ihr Prinzip. Grundzüge der philosophischen Entwicklung Schellings mit einem Ausblick auf die nachidealistischen Philosophiekonzeptionen Heideggers und Adornos* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1994).



the particular even coincided with German Idealism as the highest point of classical modernity. Its first, grand—and still grandest—manifestation was Romanticism with its enthusiasm for the incommensurable, the extraordinary, the irrational, for sentiment and genius, art and history, for the Middle Ages, for the mystic and mythological. This first manifestation was the strongest, longest, and richest in that it did not remain intellectual but expressed itself vividly in art, in public culture, and in the general worldview and feeling of its time. In Romanticism, the particular shows its full strength against individuo-universalism, together with its full beauty, fascination, and darkness. Of course, Schelling was very sympathetic to it. However, just like classical modernity was deficient because of its disregard for the particular, any movement that holds up the particular disregarding or even fighting against the universal and the individual also is deficient and will not stand long.

Romanticism lasted a little longer in art and popular sentimentality, but in the intellectual sphere, it soon became evident that it was not satisfactory. This insight was much supported by the great progress of Newtonian natural science, of technology and industrialization, which are individuo-universalistic throughout. This is why modernity somehow ‘reappeared’ or rose from its grave to find that it never had died at all. However, it was a broken modernity that reappeared, a modernity that had no more real faith in its principles. In the more sturdy spheres of life, this lack of faith showed up as a form of depraved ‘pragmatism’: ‘Of course, all men are equal, but we cannot abolish slavery now;’ ‘Of course, humanity is only one, but for the time being, our nation has to take the lead and colonialize others;’ ‘Of course, feudalism is at its end, but we do not want a revolution either, so let us stick to the old system for peace’s sake;’ and so on were its marking traits. This led to different forms of anachronism, of which the most obvious was the long survival of Romanticism in art and in sentimental feeling, whereas reality ‘around it’ became increasingly technological and cynically rationalist in an instrumental sense. We may say, generalizing just a little, that the post-idealist nineteenth century transferred its soul to Romanticism and consequently had only soulless individuo-universalistic rationalism left to deal with the more pressing necessities of life.

Of course, post-idealist modernity was intellectually extremely rich, colorful, and differentiated. But surprisingly many of its manifestations

can be understood in broad terms under the paradigm of the bubbling up of particularity. To understand this, we have to comprehend that the real challenge is not to vindicate the particular *against* the universal and the individual, but to understand their complex interrelation. This is what, intuitively, German Idealism tried to do—and what it failed to do, because it lacked a sufficient concept of the particular, that is, a comprehension of its irreducibility. The problem with most of post-idealist modernity is that it did not even understand the task. It saw or at least felt that the particular must be given more scope. But it did not try to integrate it into a philosophical comprehension that would do justice to all three (the individual, the particular, and the universal). Post-idealist modernists abandoned the project of the Grand Philosophical Theory because they thought that the failure of German Idealism was linked to this project. But that is wrong. The project was right. What was wrong is that it did not do justice to the particular<sup>16</sup> *within* this project. Post-idealist modernists thought or felt that it is the call of the particular to abandon such projects. But that, too, is not the case. This call only results if you put the voice of the particular up *against* that of the universal and the individual. However, this opposition is neither necessary nor helpful.

If you pitch the particular against the universal or the individual, you get specific forms of ‘particularism’—which, of course, are all too one-sided and inadequate to really comprehend the particular. First of all, you cannot give up *everything* besides particularity. Not even Romanticism succeeded in doing that, much less the more cautious movements that came afterwards. (Romanticism never succeeded in letting completely go of the subject, which is why it remained modern at heart and never really managed to recede to the medieval mists it so often longed for.) Many of the post-classical modern movements can be characterized by the specific alliances that they defended. Of course, by doing so, we are being deeply unfair to these movements, disregarding all their subtleties and sublime levels of reflection. However, as I mentioned at the very beginning, we will, for once, paint our picture with broad brushes, so let us go on. Communism, for example, weds particularism (classes) with universalism (communist class-less society) and the notion of a essential finite

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<sup>16</sup>And some other things.

realization (revolution)—this is a sort of crude Hegelianism without subject, of course, with the hope that the particular will somehow dialectically turn into the universal. Existentialism weds particularism with individualism and subjectivism, thereby abandoning universalism: each individual subject is distinct from any other not only by its sheer individuality, but also by its specific, yet inexhaustible and incommensurable particularity—by its very own, concrete existential condition—that no other individual can really share or grasp because it cannot be subsumed under universals.<sup>17</sup> Phenomenology, in its original form, weds particularity with subjectivism and universality. Its last point of reference is the phenomenon as such, that is, as it happens to appear, in its particular distinctness. The phenomena are then generalized and systematized, but without the attempt to reduce everything to one, individuo-universalistic principle, as in Idealism. However, phenomenology has no conceptual means to really grasp essential finite realization, that is, in this context, any event whose import goes beyond the mere flux of phenomena. Its comprehension of the individual also remains weak, for the individuality of the phenomenal subject plays no decisive role, and its comprehension of self-consciousness does not reach to the level of German Idealism, at least not before Sartre (who, of course, is only a phenomenologist ‘by the way’ of his existentialism—but a fairly good one at that). Physicalism, especially of the common-sense type, is the most old-fashioned modernism of all movements. Up to our days (undisturbed by quantum mechanics), it dreams the old individuo-universalistic dream. However, besides dispensing with the subject, it defends a ‘for-the-time-being-particularism’: ‘*For the time being*, we have only partial, particular scientific theories of particular sciences. If we were to know all that natural science possibly could know, we would have a grand, complete, individuo-universalistic theory. However, we have not arrived there yet. We have to acknowledge the particularity of our present-day knowledge.’ Of course, physicalists fight against anybody who claims to offer knowledge that is not just particular in this way because this would mean that he or she would know more than they do, which is impossible. Therefore, they simple rule out

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<sup>17</sup> Historically speaking, this is the generalization of the romantic concept of the genius.

*categorically* the possibility that anybody can know more than they do—and that is what their particularism really means.

Logical positivism is much more honest and impressive than simple physicalism because it affirms whole-heartedly the individuo-universalistic project and does not try to hide behind some particularism of the ‘not-yet-individuo-universal’ type. Like simple physicalism, it also trusts in natural science and, of course, it also acknowledges that, at present, its knowledge is incomplete. However, logical positivists do not take this as an excuse not to attempt the Grand Theory. They think that we can have universalism here and now, at least concerning some fundamental aspects. This is, as they say, because logic is at the basis of everything, and we can do logical theory: If logic is available to us here and now, we do not have to wait for natural science to finish its business. This is very much like Kantian universalism: The universal theory we can attain is *logical* theory—not metaphysical theory (which would be not only a formal, but material or objectual ‘Theory of Everything’). With regard to this, the only difference is that Kant took this logic to be transcendental, whereas logical positivists take it to be formal logic. Of course, this enables the latter to dispense with the subject, which, in their eyes, is a great advantage.

However, no really grand theory can do without the subject. Any particular empirical science may dispense with it. Nevertheless, any ontology must answer the question: How can reality be such that subjects can have knowledge about it and act in it? Any moral theory must answer the question: How can morality be such that subjects are bound by it and, at the same time, free to act against it? Any philosophy of language must answer the question: How can language be understood and used by subjects? Any philosophical aesthetical theory must answer the question: How can art be produced and recognized by subjects? And so on. This is because, in contradistinction to the particular sciences, philosophical theory has to take into account its own conditions. However, one fundamental condition of any theory is that we, the theorizing subjects, have a relation to that which is the subject matter of our theorization. If *we* theorize about those things that our specific philosophical theory is about, these things must have a relation to us—otherwise we would not be able to do so. Things do not produce theories about themselves.

We produce theories—therefore, in reality, theories cannot do without us. However, if we produce them and if our theories are about anything, then we have to be in contact not only with our theories, but also with the things they make intelligible. The claim of the German Idealists was that this relation that things bear to subjects, in any field whatsoever, is constitutive for that field and those things. This claim may be undue; it might be overstating the challenge posed by the subject. Nevertheless, the question, evidently, remains. We cannot push the subject out of philosophy.

The most impressive and ingenious documentation of this is, in my view, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. It is almost entirely 'subject free.' Then at the end comes the grand confession: All theory can only be concerned with that about which we can speak ('What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence').<sup>18</sup> The mistake is that (the early) Wittgenstein supposes that we can distinguish neatly between that about which we can speak and that about which we cannot and that, consequently, that about which we can speak can be captured completely by language. This is the old individuo-universalistic worldview, which is mistaken. Nevertheless, the above insight into the necessity of the relation to the subject is profound—exactly because it brackets a theory that goes to the extreme of being subject free. Wittgenstein himself states that such a theory would not be philosophical without these final considerations: it would be a mere tautology. It is exactly this statement that makes his theory non-tautological and philosophical—including the subject-free parts—and that opens the horizon for the subject or, more exactly, shows that the whole theory stood under this horizon right from the beginning. The late Wittgenstein then goes back to pluralism, that is, he comes to recognize the particular, although in the old-fashioned way. This may be more reasonable, but it seems less fascinating to me.

Philosophy of language is (or originally was) in principle not much more than Kant without subject.<sup>19</sup> The basic idea is still that there are

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<sup>18</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, trans. David Pears and Brian McGuinness (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), proposition 7, 151. Even in those few instances in which the subject appears beforehand, it appears only as a limit, as an anticipation of the end of the *Tractatus* as a whole.

<sup>19</sup> This observation—as most of the others—is not new.

conditions of possibility, determinations, and structures of logical space and of real space and time. These are given beforehand, ‘*a priori*.’ In Kant, they are a *priori* in the absolute sense, but it is not necessary to assume this, as we will see. In Kant, these conditions refer to the possibility of knowledge. If you take the subject out of knowledge, you have propositions and theories (or so it seems).<sup>20</sup> If you ask what is the fundamental condition of propositions and theories in the way the subject is the fundamental condition for knowledge—which is the realm within which they occur—the answer is, of course, language. The structures of language are the conditions of the possibility of propositions and theories. (Herder anticipated this move, in Kant’s own times.<sup>21</sup>)

Then the question arises whether there is one basic, absolute language or if such a language could be constructed. If there is such a language, logic has to be at its core—and of course there has to be only one logic in this case. However, the language of logic is not expressive enough to deal with reality, so it needs an extension. For this extension, people tended to turn to nature, in the physicalistic sense of course.

Many people denied that there is or could be one, ideal, absolute language and that historical, finite, natural languages are all we have got—and that artificial languages developed out of these never take us beyond the plurality of language. This is, obviously, the re-entry of the particular. Different from existentialism, which weds the particular with the individual, language pluralism weds it with universality: there is no absolute or pure universality. There are universalities as sets of conditions of the possibility of the individual. However, these are, themselves, particular. You may call them language games, worlds, cultures, fields of sense, theoretical frameworks, or what have you. What is common to all these conceptions is that whatever is given can be given only within an

<sup>20</sup> If you understand ‘knowledge’ in the strict sense, they also need to be true and justified and maybe be characterized by some additional Gettier-inspired X, but this is not important for us now.

<sup>21</sup> J.G. Herder, *Eine Metakritik zur Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, vol. 8 of *Johann Gottfried Herder. Werke in zehn Bänden*, ed. Günter Arnold et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–2000), 303–604, cf. 568, 593; parts of which have been translated as ‘Selections from *A Metacritique on the Critique of Pure Reason*,’ in *Metacritique: The Linguistic Assault on German Idealism*, ed. and trans. Jere Paul Surber (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2001), 89–130. On Herder’s philosophy of language, see: Ulrich Gaier, *Herders Sprachphilosophie und Erkenntniskritik* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog 1988).

encompassing something that provides the conditions of the possibility of its determination, existence, and manifestation and that this encompassing something is not unique, but that there is a plurality of them that cannot be placed under one single meta-encompassing something. To many people nowadays, not only philosophers, this seems so self-evident that they do not even ask for reasons why this should be so. This is Kant's late victory, even if it has cost him what was most dear to him: the subject and the *a priori* in the strong sense. But his grand, original idea of the transcendental has prevailed.

Perhaps surprisingly, of all the late modern philosophical movements, it is the hermeneutic tradition that comes closest to the comprehensive outlook of German Idealism. However, it is weak in its consideration of the universal. It is similar to existentialism in that its basis is the individual subject in its irreducible particularity. Nevertheless, it tries to establish some real, substantial communication between these subjects by way of hermeneutic circles. This 'circling' effects an approximation of intersubjective understanding that, because of its particularity, is never complete. There are some fundamental problems with such an 'infinite approximation' to the universal, generally communicable, but at least the hermeneutic tradition does not give up such ideals.

One very important theme I am here passing over is the question of intersubjectivity. Besides the particular, this is the other big blind spot of German Idealism (and, of course, the two are connected).<sup>22</sup> However, different from the particular, intersubjectivity remains a marginal theme in post-idealist modernity. The few attempts to understand the particular not within the frame of the universal or the individual, but within intersubjective relation, as the irreducible alterity of the other subject (like in Buber, Rosenzweig, and Levinas, for example), are very interesting and promising, but I cannot go into this here. However, it seems to me

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<sup>22</sup> This point has been made and very well argued in Vittorio Hösle, *Hegels System: Der Idealismus der Subjektivität und das Problem der Intersubjektivität*, vol. 1 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1987), especially 263–275. I think that his analysis remains valid. Of course, German Idealists, especially Hegel, wrote a lot about social structures and political systems. However, they always linked individuals to one another by subsuming them under common universal concepts, such as 'subject' or 'person,' or concepts that express their union as in 'family' or 'state.' This leaves out the irreducible, *particular* alterity of other individual subjects.

that even these attempts are stuck in the antagonistic divide between the particular on the one hand and the universal/individual on the other.

## 7 The Challenge

As I already pointed out, the problem with post-idealist modernists in general is that they understood and took up the challenge of accounting for the particular, but did so by giving up one of the other elements—sometimes tacitly, unconsciously, often fiercely fighting against that which they abandoned. However, with this their theories not only became unilateral and insufficient. Their conception of the very particular itself also necessarily became contorted because you only can understand it properly in its interrelation with the individual and the universal. This is why we got the various forms of pluralism and fragmentism on the one hand (the particular wed to the universal) and various conceptions of the human individual as incommunicably particular on the other (at most, of such individuals hermeneutically circling round one another in never ending attempts of approach). Of course, besides this, there still are some desperate attempts to go back to pure individuo-universalism without the particular and, normally, without the subject as well.<sup>23</sup> However, these are not very popular nowadays in public opinion.

What is most popular nowadays in public opinion in academic philosophy right up to formal logic are the various forms of pluralism and fragmentism. As I have tried to explain, plurality is only the outside appearance of particularity as seen from the viewpoint of the universal. There is nothing wrong with this outlook on plurality. Plurality is obviously a fundamental aspect of reality. However, it is not very helpful to turn our comprehension of plurality into pluralism. At least, this is not any more helpful than to turn to monism, dualism, or even Hegelian tri-unitarianism. Plurality as such is static—although there may be dynamics within it. However, the real challenge is not only to affirm the particular, to accept it as something given, but also to show how it essentially interrelates

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<sup>23</sup> A fine example is L.B. Puntel in his late *Struktur und Sein. Ein Theorierahmen für eine systematische Philosophie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).



with the individual and the universal, and this is only possible if we investigate how they originate from one another and how they originate together. The key to understanding the interrelation of the individual, the particular, and the universal cannot be the mere givenness of any one of them or of combinations of them. The key can only be an essential moment of finite realization.

Philosophy goes beyond mere givenness. Other sciences explain what is given. Philosophy asks: How *can* anything be given as such? How can anything be given to us? How can anything given be presented through a theory—including the very theory that seeks to explain this? Philosophy asks about that which other sciences tacitly presuppose: How can there be something and not nothing? How can we access anything? How can theory be about anything? This means implicitly that philosophy is concerned about the whole—not as some given totality, but as the open scope of ‘anything’ within its questions. It means that philosophy is concerned about ourselves, because without us, there may be objects and theories, but no knowledge and no science (as a project executed in space and time). Finally, it means that philosophy is concerned about itself because it is theory itself: it is self-referring. These are not questions that philosophers invented to justify their existence. These questions arise naturally when we follow our quest for knowledge—if we keep searching beyond those tokens and those types of knowledge that are already given to us. Philosophy also has other work to do besides answering the Big Questions. However, if it abandons these, something will be missing not only in philosophy, but also in us, in humanity as a whole. Philosophy must not give up the search for the Grand Theory—not because philosophy is so great, but simply because that is what it is responsible for.

Philosophy should come back to its duty. It should take up again the challenge that German Idealists accepted: to develop a principle-based, comprehensive systematic theory. Like German Idealism, this theory should be able to explain how things are accessible to the subject. Unlike German Idealism, it should also be able to explain how things can be given without regard to the aspect of their being accessible by the subject. Going beyond German Idealism, this theory should explain not only the universal and the individual, but also the particular (as irreducible to the other two) and the connectivity between all of them. It should explain

how self-reference is possible *together with* allo-reference, how freedom is possible together with being essentially related to other persons in their irreducible alterity. Finally, this theory should show how all this can manifest and originate in and through finite realizations. As I already indicated, finite realization is the key to the whole. This is perhaps the most important lesson that German Idealism gave us.

This, then, would be the theory that would finally take us beyond modernity—beyond modernity's continuous 'going beyond' by abandoning one of its fundamental elements and reintroducing another, its game of trumping each other in austerity or in frugality, its merry battle between classicism and baroque, its constant production of the absolutely new and unheard-of. Deep in our hearts, we are all bored of this, so why not take up the challenge? Of course, we may fail. However, what is true in personal love is also true in love for wisdom: It is better to have loved and failed than never to have loved at all.

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